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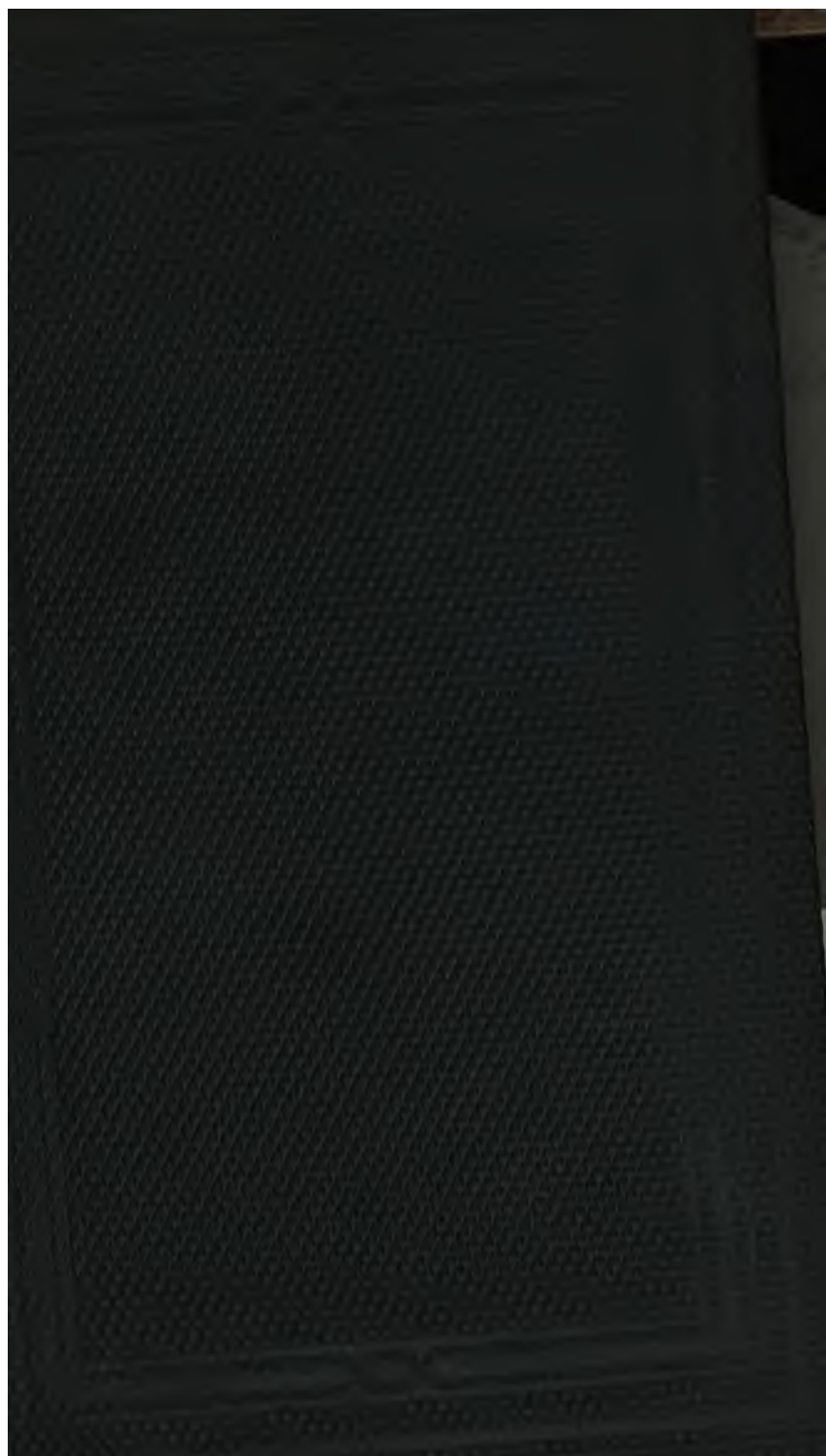
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# A LOSS GAINED.

BY PHILIP CRESSWELL.

“———I shall tell you  
A pretty tale; it may be, you have heard it;  
But, since it serves my purpose, I will venture  
To scale 't a little more—”

LONDON:  
SMITH, ELDER AND CO., 65, CORNHILL.

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# A LOSS GAINED.

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## CHAPTER I.

### ORMISTON FORD.

COMPARED with cities of the Manchester class, the great industrial hives of the north and west, Ormiston Ford was but an average commercial town, with industry merely sufficient to circulate its current of life fairly, and save it from being utterly distanced, like a number of mouldering old-world places of similar standing. But, like many such places, Ormiston had other than mere trading pretensions—a rather contemptuous consideration for absolute manufacturing eminence, as well became a city of its pure lineage and long descent: whose name dated from the Heptarchy, and whose cathedral bells had rung for centuries before cotton-spinning was invented; when the grouse and black-cock whirled over the northern metropolis of smoke.

The absence of manufactories was, indeed, a chief peculiarity, and a great attraction of residence in Ormiston; the picturesque beauty of the neighbourhood was thereby unimpaired, and the town itself allowed a rare gift of blue and sunshine, besides, a London black was utterly unknown there; so what with its fair climate and planted environs, proximity to the sea coast completed every advantage. But this was not all; other than mere material favours combined in the opinion of many to render Ormiston, perhaps, the most desirable provincial dwelling-place in England, for its social seductions were great; the inhabitants, characteristically lively and pleasure-loving, were so devoted to amusement that occupation for those who had nothing else to do was ever at hand; there were fêtes in progress, stories and news to gather, pleasant people to idle with, and, for the ambitious, fine sets to flatter and cultivate—in a word, all the appliances and aids of civilized modern life.

In a neighbourhood so desirable, where people were rather engaged in spending fortunes than in acquiring them, many families of influence and note had, from time to time, built mansions and settled. Such traders as had risen to opulence never fancied to emigrate in search of enjoyment. On the con-

trary, individuals, whom circumstances had driven from home, ever sighed for a return, and across the broad Atlantic, dreamed of the green valley of the Orme. In fact, the provincial refinement of the town was by no means inconsiderable, nor as a consequence was either the self-appreciation of its inhabitants.

Amidst the élite of Ormiston, one family was pre-eminent—distinguished both by merit and importance, though neither of ancient nor of very noble race; for the mists of only two generations clouded over its descent, and its founder was still remembered by a few very elderly people: a hard-brained tanner, factor, usurer, schemer, piling up his gold in a greasy shop of the back slums. Nevertheless, the prestige of its name was considerable, for the Bradels had made such use of their bare century of existence, as easily to hold at last a forward rank amidst a most aristocratic society.

When in good time this vigorous founder undertook to *décrasser* himself he succeeded in it also, as well as in everything else which he put his hand to. Although at first his attempts were ridiculed, his ambition was a presumption, his pretensions absurd; his purchases of property, and the footing of his establishment, equally so; the meal and tan bark in fact were thrown at him freely; and bitter stories of his


social misadventures and coarse manners circulated. But he did not mind. Continuing to entertain gorgeously, to keep his counsel and pursue his end, at last he reached it; and died in the zenith of glory, a worshipped magnate of the land. His successor pursued the same tactics so well, that by degrees people's memories clotted with the good cheer of Everley Hall, and it became excessively bad taste to recall the obscurity of a family which commenced to be distinguished as much by merit as by wealth, for at the time of our story, it had attained considerable importance. The Bradels were the centre of movement and of civilization then, the promoters of all that was useful and progressive, leaders of taste and fashion—in a word, the Medici of Ormiston.

Such at least had been the acquired character of the house, which some latter years of comparative retirement had in no degree lessened. That retirement indeed was sufficiently explained by the state of health of the actual Mr. Bradel, who was now a broken and declining invalid: with him we have but little to do. But his son, heir to the honours of the house, Edwin Traverse Bradel, captain in the Mocton Yeomanry Hussars, is a personage of much importance to the reader.

The array of family portraits gilding the dining-

room walls at Everley was at first sight decidedly imposing; for, with a far-seeing eye to the interests of posterity, the first founder had taken care to procure the portrait of every collateral relative and connection who could possibly be recognized. It was a provident and wise arrangement: for how else are people to acquire ancestors, if their forefathers won't get themselves painted? Ralph or Reginald might have been a sad scamp through life and a trouble to his family; but when the originals are mouldered and forgotten, the painted copies may smile on us very respectably in their laced hats and ruffles.

On entering the dining-room at Everley, the first object which struck the visitor was Captain Bradel's full-length, in the gorgeous uniform of his corps, enlivening the whole side of the vast apartment, for it was a flaming masterpiece, arrogant in composition, brilliant in colour and execution, even sanguinary in tone: the profusion of plumes and red paint, the defiant bearing, and fierce battle glare on the countenance, the grizzly war horse plunging on a background of cannonading and carnage, were in keeping, and a wild, windy sunset of lurid torch-light, altogether completed the truculent effect. But, on lengthened view, it would be felt that the insidious craft of the painter went for something in



that great work of art : subtracting the splendid frenzy of detail, the vermilion and warlike trappings ; passing the successful entourage to pause in calm criticism on the simple individual, nothing remained in the portrait to justify that blazing canvas. Obviously then, the character of the man appeared out of harmony with the character of the scene. His was a mere girlish face, white and insignificant ; with straight hair, of dull blond, parting on a compressed temple ; sloping eyelids ; and short, straight nose, with singularly feeble nostril ; every feature pretty and small, if not mean : it was simply a narrow commonplace face that few would look at a second time.


Few gentlemen, be it understood, for with the ladies it was, of course, different,—at least, with the ladies of Ormiston : they had views concerning the unmarried Mr. Bradel, which the ruder sex could not share, and naturally considered him accordingly. In their eyes, not only his appearance, but the endowments of his mind, the qualities of his disposition, deserved fullest commendation ;—not only was he handsome, but far better than handsome. The virtues usually possessed by pretenders to ample estates were decreed to him largely. Indeed, a something of less perfection might have increased his popularity with them ; for as he actually stood,

without a drawback to his list of advantages, he seemed rather placed too high for the most aspiring to attain. It seemed almost unwarrantable presumption in any girl seriously to hope for such a prize. He was to be dreamt of, not hoped for, and many a foolish dream had been about him: because of such dreams many an eligible offer had been declined,—an offer which perhaps offered no more, and was secretly wept over at the bitter waking.

Popularity of this nature, no doubt, considerably helped to reconcile Mr. Bradel to his retirement in “so dull and insignificant a place,” as in lofty moments he chose to designate the town. In addition, also, the hunting was famous; so what with his horses, and the distractions of society during winter, and his fine cutter down at the port for a yearly summer cruise, he managed to live and pass the time.

To flatter good folk by eating their dinners and dancing with their daughters awhile, to trifle with such amusements as came easily to hand, was not altogether unprofitable dalliance either, as thought Edwin’s father; interest might be useful by-and-by, and when the county became vacant, might turn to good account.

Although the Bradels were a pushing race, and had originally acquired social eminence only by active struggle, as we have said, still that was long ago; for





at the period our tale opens their position was securely reached, and retained without effort. Of late the family had lived in great retirement, if in undiminished state : and although repeated domestic bereavements had reduced its members to this only son ; yet the footing of the establishment at Everley was in no degree lessened. The retinue of servants, and style of equipages, were maintained as usual on a scale suitable to the pretensions of the place, and indoor or out, in every detail those pretensions were scrupulously considered.

It was a perfect residence, possessed a chapel and ball-room, a picture-gallery recruited from yearly exhibitions, conservatories, and pineries. And though the fine valley of the Orme, renowned for its woodland scenery, was rich in beautiful seats, no mansion in the shire round could boast a broader sweep of park and demesne or nobler timber. Extensive plantations were indeed the noted characteristic of the entire district : on the north bank of the river the remnant of a royal forest still remained, old family seats abounded, and viewed from neighbouring heights Ormiston appeared to be closely hemmed in by trees ; the country then seemed to invade the town and intersect it at all points, as if the clusters of fair white houses had dropt suddenly on a virgin turf

amidst shrubs and blossoming trees standing unchanged. Even on entering the streets one did not always lose this fancy, as in the early summer glimpses of flowers and verdure were caught at every turn: frequent garden walls, trellised with brilliant creepers, topped with fringes of evergreens; waving lines of violet and gold, hedges of laburnum and lilac, pleasantly breaking up the brick and gray of the irregular streets.

## CHAPTER II.

## REMONSTRANCE.

THE Orme, from which the town derived its name, was a river of importance, whose broad waters issued clear, as crystal and untainted from the eastern suburb as they had entered at the western. Eastward it flowed for about a mile, when an arm of Hamley Wood, crossing at right angles, shut out the view at that point; and also the village of Mocton somewhat farther on. About half-way between Ormiston and this village, on the white limestone road running parallel to the river, and within the skirt of Hamley wood, was a plain two-storied house of the simplest kind, standing within a modest enclosure of garden and pleasure ground. This was Mocton Cottage; and on a morning in spring, a young lady opened the rusty entrance gate ending the straight, ugly avenue which led directly from the high road to the house. If insignificant from the road, the cottage did not gain on nearer view; for little sign of either care or comfort was evident: here and there the plaster

had crumbled away; black oozy stains disfigured the front, at the angles of the windows, and at intervals along the eaves, marked the joinings of the hanging shoot. Linen lay bleaching on the laurels at one end; and on the corresponding side was a patched conservatory, the wood-work of which, green and mouldy with age, seemed fast advancing to decrepitude. A few trim flower-beds of the grass-plot alone contrasted with the general appearance of neglect, and even they were not strictly watched, for a hardy marauding hen scampered from a bed of seedlings at the sight of the stranger.

The visitor was a graceful, lady-like person, in her first youth, and of considerable personal attractions.

"Clearly Jane is not in the garden, as the fowls are loose," she said. "Poor Jane! how does she manage with such difficulties at every turn — where find perseverance? In such a case I know I should give up trying; it were indeed far easier simply to let anything that liked happen, than ever to strive against unconquerable obstacles. Only last winter the roof of the greenhouse blew in, and everything in it perished; a frosty spring blighted what flowers remained; and even now at every opportunity the fowls are among her seedlings. Yet in spite of discouragement, she recommences again, patient as

ever. Perhaps it is because she is no longer young," added the young lady, with grave reflection: "that may be the reason. It may be easy to bend to the humble drudgery of life after the great happiness of all has gone by, when the view is behind and there is no longer much to expect. But does one cease to expect? above all, has Jane had her happiness? How after such a life can she be content to seek for nothing more, and endure a lot of utter dreariness as blank of recollections as of hope, submitting to the conditions of daily routine, and the duties and dulness of home; and that quietly, with complete self-denial? Prompt at the call of others, at the service of any idler like me, who comes to spoil a morning."

So busily revolving the problem, by what strange process people were eventually brought to like staying at home and absolutely abjure balls and dancing parties, Caroline Middleton, one of the recognized belles of Ormiston, went up to the house to seek her friend.

Jane Troye, bending over a table strewn with litter of work and paper, looked up laughing as she entered the breakfast parlour.

"What! Caroline! and at this hour! It is only eleven o'clock, and you are up, dressed, and half a mile from home already. There must be an unusual

difficulty of disposing of your time to account for it, or else you happen to want me very badly. On Tuesday you were to have come, remember; and on the Saturday previous made an appointment at Miss Fletcher's, which of course you did not keep, as, in truth, I fully expected. 'Tis well, however, to have you on any terms; so sit down and let me hear about you. Give a full account of yourself, and make it as long a story as you please; papa and mamma are gone to bring Nora home, I have the whole day to myself, and no one shall interrupt us."

"Jane, don't talk about it. You have been haunting me like an unfulfilled good resolution, and regularly every day for the fortnight have I been going to see you; but some hindrance always turned up. I seriously believe 'tis because I have so much to do; for on Saturday mamma must take me to the band on the long crescent, and on Tuesday Mrs. Drake called; and the day after, a sudden difficulty arose about my dress for the Lytton's ball: then followed the ball itself, and for two days afterwards I had such a headache."

"Then I suppose you lay in bed till noon."

"No matter; I want to show I had the intention to come, if possible. What a lovely drawing, how fast it is getting on!—if I could only draw like you, or

do anything like that. How do you manage to plod on so patiently bit by bit, and then keep the colours distinct and in order? There I fail now with only one tint. Suppose at ships in a storm in sepia, or skies where there are no definite forms, I do pretty well; but colour and drawing upset me altogether. What shall we do this morning? I propose Hamley Wood and a walk. The sight of your littered table, paints, glue, worsted, and work, makes me dizzy already. I want fresh air."

"Try the garden, then," said Jane, rising, "that is all I can do for you. My hands are so full on account of Nora's return, that I must not leave the house; there are so many things to be done, that if you cannot sit quietly while at my work, I must send you away soon."

"After coming expressly to give myself in charge for the day! Very well! Do you know there is excessive pride in your continual affectation of business, Jane? What right have you to make me feel ever so idle and frivolous? It is not fair: nor kind, nor true either: for I am not as bad as you force me to seem by contrast. In my own way I do good, without blazoning it like others . . . You will come up to us this evening at all events; there is no objection to that?"

"I have the entire evening engaged——"

"But mamma sent me on purpose to make you come," urged Caroline, "and I want you, besides: that is the truth. I have been this age left to my own guidance and devices, and you know what that means. Seriously, I want your advice, and perhaps have secrets to tell——"

"If wanting advice you would be the last to seek it; and as for secrets," returned Jane, smiling, "no doubt the town shares them, as usual."

"It would not be difficult to slander me in your ears, I know; but have you heard anything of me lately? is the world talking? and of what nature was the topic? I have some reasons for asking."

"And good reasons for thinking, I suspect. How have you passed your time, Caroline? At what amusements have you been engaged since? Examine your conscience, and see what I might have heard. It is too bad; will you really never learn prudence? Can't you fritter your time and life away as well, without becoming town's talk also? Remember, that malice has eyes and tongues, always on the watch, and that you have made yourself a host of enemies. If you only knew what things are said of you!"

"If I did, you know I would not care."



"But you ought: indeed you ought to care."

"Because some spiteful old maids, or jealous young ones, choose to chatter," said Caroline; "not I, indeed. Besides, why expect sense from me? you always say I'll never have any."

"And I now begin to hope that you never may."

"Why, pray?"

"Because I fear sorrow and suffering only will teach it to you."

"Come; I may as well understand you at once: then this is all about Mr. Bradel," Caroline said abruptly, after a pause, colouring slightly. "What have you heard?"

"That after having failed once, you are both trying again to make fools of each other, then," replied Jane.

"And who is likely to succeed? Not much fear on my account, I should think. But you were surprised to hear it?"

"I certainly thought, that if neither sense nor pride preserved you from relapse into that absurdity, at least recollections of past events would. However, if you persist in not minding experience, you will never learn; but must remain a child to the end of the chapter."

"Really! What do they say?"

"That he pays you attention again."

"Is that all? He pays every one attention; of whom might not that be said?"

"Also that you permit him, you accept his advances," continued Jane.

"Is it Mr. Bradel of Everley? what girl in Ormiston wouldn't?"

"If there be one in Ormiston who knows what Mr. Bradel's attentions are worth, you ought," retorted Jane, "so I have little fear on that score."

"But you have, nevertheless. Let us hear on what account, and if possible, without beginning by a lecture; for that you know is not the least use, I have heard all about myself a hundred times over. But a sketch of public opinion, if you like. What does the world say, and who was the last busybody you met? . . . Here is your cousin, Mr. Penrose, though, positively coming in at the gate," added Caroline, turning and interrupting herself; "how excessively provoking."

Jane was not pleased either: "He will go at once: I will send him away," she added, advancing to meet the fresh-looking, handsome young man who came smiling up the walk.

"Good-morrow, Jane. I have had a famous walk; heard the cuckoo east of Hamley the first time this year. By-the-by, they are cutting the timber there,

spoiling the entire glen. The woods, you remember, were sublet last year, but now the Bradels have got possession, and very likely they are doing it. I hope our side will escape."

Luke Penrose paused: the obvious coldness of both ladies chilled him; he became immediately therefore conscious of intrusion, and in a calmer tone, proceeded to account for his presence. "Here is the music I promised; Lumney sent it last night, and it was as well to bring it at once. Such a fine morning, I was glad of the excuse, you may believe."

"The music was not of the least consequence, it might have waited; I did not expect, nor want it either. However, as you have taken the trouble, I am of course obliged," said Jane calmly, receiving the roll of paper.

Miss Middleton merely bowed, then continued to converse with her friend without further notice of his presence. At length, however, perceiving that he neglected the intended hint, and exhibited no intention of going away, she herself felt it necessary to leave; and accordingly, drawing Jane aside, pressed her again to give promise of a visit in the evening. She wanted her; mamma wanted her likewise. It would be a disappointment if she refused; some friends were to

dine, and her presence was counted on. So declaring the affair arranged, Miss Middleton shook hands, and without a word or look to the gentleman, turned down the walk.

He had expected to be taken leave of; and as the entrance gate closed on her exit, his face reddened up as if a whip were drawn across it.

## CHAPTER III.

## AMENDMENT.

"I APPEAR to disturb you; my visit seems ill-timed," Luke Penrose said, a moment afterwards to his cousin: "I shall leave if you desire it: shall I request the lady to return?"

"I am not responsible, Luke, for her indifference. If she prefers another engagement to the enjoyment of your society, it is not my fault."

"An engagement of what nature?"

"I cannot tell."

"So pressing that she cannot afford a moment's passing politeness—not even take leave of me with courtesy. Do you know why that is?"

"I really do not."

"Then I will tell you. It is because I am poor, only that. Even civility to a pauper is superfluous; and she merely re-echoes an established truth in repeating the lesson practically. A pauper is not a sentient thing; ill-treatment is his birth-right, his inheritance: charity itself cannot recognize him, even his very

wrongs are sneered at; and you have yourself made me feel so."

"And that in a degree may be justified," answered Jane, calmly: "when poverty arises solely from selfish neglect; when through wilful fault, it presses most on those who least deserve it, it has no claim to indulgence that I can see. But are you so spoiled, Luke, as to lose temper at a fancied slight—because Caroline chooses not to waste the morning as you are doing? What absurd vanity."

"As usual, exaggerate every trifle. I am accustomed to misconstruction."

"Unfortunately, it is impossible to misconstrue," Jane answered; "your conduct, if not your motive, appears unhappily plain. Passing gratitude or honour, Luke; but is it simply honest to waste time and opportunities, to violate your engagements to the extent of bringing on the present crisis? What is to console your mother? On what future promise shall she venture the hope so sadly wrecked on your career, for her long life of anxiety—the sum of trials patiently endured for your sake—where is your return?—You understand to what I allude," added Jane, pausing: "she has just written to me."

His eyes fell ere he answered.

"This is unkind of you," he said—"you who

understand what the struggle has been. Have I been wanting in full purpose? is it will, or is it the mere execution which has failed me; have I not persevered in the face of continued failure—if perseverance to the end of success has proved impossible? But being unfortunate, I must needs be judged blameable; you are like the rest, who see virtue only in result, and cannot appreciate the effort which has striven, but failed. However, it is as well: I neither seek sympathy from you nor from others. I do not want it.”

“I cannot understand, being in earnest, that your will does not create its own strength,” Jane answered; “like the body, the muscle of the mind gains by exercise. It is possible to acquire any natural quality necessary to the fulfilment of plain duty; possible to exert the will, and by perseverance make it so strong that it must conquer at last. Perhaps your error lies even there: you may rely on yourself, on mere human effort; the very strongest indeed are feeble if left wholly unaided. Do you never seek help from a higher source?”

“As usual,” he said bitterly, turning aside; “always the same: harping on the miseries of my actual condition, which already are too clearly present to my mind; but when it comes to doing, when I seek assistance,

or applicable advice—as if your object were only to torment, you parry me with a platitude.”

“And is that my object?”

“It is, nevertheless, what occurs.”

“Could I but inspire you with a share of the interest I take in your welfare, Luke! But really it is getting late; you are become a man without man’s work or a man’s aim in life: it is time now to have care of your own affairs,” she added with warmth.

“Care: it seems I have had my share.”

“Care, in the sense of anxiety, no doubt; but in prudent forethought, in the steady action which would certainly proceed from it, you have been hitherto wholly deficient. I repeat, but not to torment, that you will never acquire the necessary steadiness, while rejecting as secondary and trivial what is of all importance——serious moral as well as mental discipline, the very principle and groundwork of all character. That is a truth, Luke, which sooner or later you will have to acknowledge and apply; and because now is the time to do so, I would press it by every motive most capable of influencing your feelings as well as your mind. The case is far from hopeless; yet it is far from being too late. Consider a moment. Your prospects, your mother’s happiness and your own are at stake. Your only chance in life to gain or miss,



depends on an effort of your will ; and if you cannot make it, if you do let the chance escape, I really cannot see what is to become of you. Come, you will try again ; you will promise me so much. I must have another attempt: not a mere passionate freak ; but a resolute and steady trial."

"I have done my best: have tried at least to do so ; yet the result has been failure upon failure," answered Luke, in a faltering tone. "After a past of such miserable attempts, how can one hope longer?"

"The obstacles in your path grow with dwelling on," continued his cousin ; "your imagination exaggerates them: you look too far in advance, there is the fault, and are already half vanquished before entering the lists: you spend yourself in interjections, and waste half your energy in resolutions. Let us have no more of it. Begin at once, at last, immediate practice is worth a world of good purposes for you. Put your arm to the work: the direction of your will is clear, but its execution is feeble, and experiment only can strengthen it."

"It is exactly of that I came to speak," Luke replied, more hopefully, "for Mr. Dacer has again consented to allow me another chance, and if I should succeed at last, he promises all the past shall be condoned and forgotten."

“ When was that ? ”

“ Yesterday : only yesterday afternoon we had a long interview, and he spoke on the whole kindly.”

“ Why do you waste the day loitering here, then ? Are you in your senses ? ”

“ I came but to tell you of it.”

“ To tell me ? I wish to hear nothing of you until your conduct speaks differently,” answered Jane, with some bitterness. “ The worst preparation for action is to talk of it. So you have wantonly sacrificed another entire day as usual ! Listen, Luke : you complain that I never have practical, applicable advice to offer ; now, here is some, and, moreover, I insist on your adopting it immediately. You will return to Ormiston at once ; less than an hour will see you back at the office, and then the entire afternoon remains. You would not think of wasting it ; I think better than that of you : at all events you surely are not about to procrastinate again ? So good-by ; I have much occupation myself for the day, and may have to pass the evening at Middleton Lodge.”

Jane immediately went up towards the porch, and her cousin was alone.

Such a parting, however, was too abrupt and unexpected for his pride easily to brook. His temper, a moment lulled, reawakened in consequence, and

in renewed vexation he went slowly towards the gate, thoroughly undecided as to his immediate movements. "Return to town! not at all; this perpetual lecturing was at length intolerable: and he would not submit to it. As well retire from the conflict, and give up at once: for he was tired of the struggle. Every one was against him: it was his fate to be wronged, and he would accept it: no use in resisting fate." With the fermentation of his mind gaining rapid intensity in this manner, Luke was soon in a very inflammable state, prepared to explode at the merest provocation; and the provocation consequently did not delay.

On nearing Middleton Lodge gate, a showy equipage came round a turn of the road at such speed, that for an instant he was in slight danger of being driven over, and actually became spattered from head to foot. The driver called out at first in an angry tone, then drove along the road laughing and looking behind with evident enjoyment.

"As if it were the best of jokes, just to escape grinding under his hoofs," Luke muttered. "But why not? I was in the way—in his way: what matter for a worm more or less, if Mr. Bradel of Everley only enjoys his freak? It would surely have amused the gentleman, and this very mud from his wheels is

a sort of favour to such as me. Why did I suffer it? In what does he excel, that our lots should be so widely opposite? If I had him here by the throat upon the road I should be as good as he then, and where is the difference. Have I not the same wants and longings, the same capacity for enjoyment, need, and right to it; yet to him every form of happiness and the best gifts of fortune are not good enough: flatterers fawn on him; his vices are frolics to smile at, while my hardest striving fails to win a bare beggar's pittance of even charity. Why is this—this profusion at the bloated rich man's feast, while the very crusts of the table are stingily denied to me? because I am poor,—only because I am poor—poor,” Luke repeated with bitter energy.

“God help the poor! for the sake of my starving child, young gentleman, help!”

A want-stricken face met him with the words; a squalid infant whimpered amidst the rags, and a skeleton arm was extended in supplication. Luke flung a coin to the beggar-woman and passed on.

Our fallen nature is so prone to slide backward of itself that it is well the good principle should occasionally stir within us, and compel our course in the right direction.

So scarcely had Luke complied, however grace-

lessly with this simple appeal, than at once the current of his thoughts reversed mysteriously. The tension of his brain relaxed—its balance was restored, for a broad question of common humanity came immediately to scatter the gnawing jealousy and envious vexation of his mind; a question his nature was too loyal and upright to disavow.

“Why are you not shivering on the roadside in hunger and nakedness?” asked a voice. “How different is your position from your fellow mortal there; yet you complain. If your intelligence, your capacity, all the higher faculties of your nature were absorbed in want, numbed to dulness, or extinguished utterly in the bare, humble struggle for life, for nothing but bare life, that numbers as good as you toil, and toil vainly, to supply with the coarsest requisites—how different then?” Such was the argument of combined conscience and reason which Luke would in vain resist: it was in vain that he shuffled from the point—self-conviction was unavoidable.

When a while afterwards he humbly repassed in the direction of the town, the traces of anger had already left his calm, thoughtful countenance: his mind was filled with sober projects then, busy revolving the plain duties, the many difficulties of his position. And though in themselves easy, those

duties were serious to him: it might have been precisely because of their being ordinary and of easy attainment. How frequently those who have all but weathered the surf and buffetings of life, gravel and go down in the end on the dull sunken shoal of perseverance. So pleasant it is to yawn again, although the hour may have rung; to make evident short cuts when no eye observes: yet perseverance to the end only has the promise given of reward. Neither dash nor daring; no transcendental chivalry, nor assault of windmills, no mere moon-snuffing will serve: the wise virgin's trimmed lamp only wins the great Bridegroom's smile. Not that Luke's light shone faint or dim, far from it. He was a man of principle and honour, generous in heart and mind, slave to no vulgar habit or mean desire, although his course had hitherto been trammelled, and its end missed. But because the vices of the world had not overset him, he might yet go to pieces upon its vanities; and this was what Jane feared for her cousin—a danger daily becoming imminent.

## CHAPTER IV.

## CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE.

ORMISTON was too pleasant a place not to be fraught with various temptations to one of Luke's disposition. Society was open to him there, and he loved it. Young men of fortune liked and noticed him so intimately that it was not always easy to avoid going too far ; tasting too freely of enjoyments, innocent of themselves, innocent also as he took them singly, but most hurtful in result. For he had work to do, and bread to earn ; a life of serious toil to face. To which he was pledged, and admitted the pledge by the strongest ties :—by circumstance ; for he was poor : by the highest force of gratitude, and of honour ; for a mother who had pinched and striven through many weary widowed years, to educate and give him a start in life, was dependent on him : a mother who, even to the very last, had sacrificed on his account. For when Luke got appointed to the office of her relative, Mr. Dacer, the rich Ormiston merchant, she accepted the post of companion to a

lady in London, in order to free the whole of her slender income for his use. So there was in his case every urgent motive which could fix a man to his work, and force him through with it, and Luke accordingly entered on his career full of promise and of fair hopes; but gradually the pleasures and social seductions of Ormiston began to blunt his industrial energies, and became in a fair way of ultimately doing for him what old Dotter, the book-keeper in Mr. Dacer's office, always said they would.

"For it don't surprise me to see it," peevishly observed that jealous personage, looking over some neglected accounts of Luke's: "I met a many of them fine 'prentices in my day, and never one that was good for aught. I saw from the first how 't would be, when he came to the office with his hat brushed and his gloves: mind you, gloves on, and his shoes creaking, as proud as if he had a thousand pounds at the bank. I said, the lad's uppish, he won't last; there will be an end of him soon: and wasn't I right—wasn't I right?"

There was likelihood at least that Dotter's prediction might be verified, yet Jane Troye did not fear it the least. She had therefore often serious interviews with her cousin, scenes of remonstrance such as that recorded; and on this occasion after



Luke had left, she remained a prey to serious and prolonged anxiety concerning him. Partly in consequence also, she became so little disposed for society then, as to decide on putting off the visit to Middleton Lodge until the morning; Caroline, indeed, might expect her, but to-morrow would do quite as well: and it was no case for ceremony, so Jane decided to enliven the solitude of the evening by employment amidst her flowers.

The neatness of the small grass garden before the windows contrasted with the overgrown shrubbery and neglected condition of other parts of the pleasure ground; an advantage entirely due to Jane's own care. For although a gardener came occasionally from the town to prune the shrubs and keep the walks in a sort of order, yet the flowers were her own work, and almost her only pastime. She had often occasion also to bless the narrow circumstances that first led her to cultivate a taste which had become a valuable and cherished resource: not only were her flowers brighter for the care they cost, but an hour in the garden was a grand receipt for lightening the mind and spirits. So it proved on this occasion; the oppression of her mind gradually lightened under her favourite work, and by the time the sun sank, when the gathering dusk forced her to desist, she was in the happiest

mood. Besides the influence of her occupation, however, just then a deep source of anticipated pleasure assisted to raise her spirits ; something long looked forward to, and just on the point of being realized : the return from school of her younger and only sister. That was to be an epoch in her life ; the date from which a golden age of domestic happiness should flow : and it was so long expected ; her imagination had endowed it so richly with all advantages, that it seemed impossibly near at last. She would have a companion then ; her past loneliness would cease at last. Her father's indifference could not resist the new interests which would render family life attractive once more ; and her mother would become kind and genial again, under the influence of renewed hopes.

Jane had reached the period when youth, awaking from its illusions, tires of hope, and of looking ever indefinitely forward, but humbly accepts the present as an average of the best that is yet to come ; and acknowledging such a plain condition, seeks peace in the hour actually passing, in fulfilment of its duties, in its reasonable and positive enjoyments. But though satisfied that her temper was too calm now ; that she was far too sensible to permit further delusions, and dream of better in prospect

than the everyday middling of daily life; yet she did look forward: unconsciously she desired still, and hoped, as we all do. Whether it be fair or foul weather, whether in the dawn or on the stroke of midnight, we always want something to come, or are waiting for something to go, in this fickle world of light and shadow.

As her anticipations were now actually approaching consummation, Jane's slender means were taxed to make the house look cheerful; above all to have the garden in its best order in honour of the event. The monthly rosebuds of the trellis were arranged to cluster by the window of the room destined for Nora; the prettiest trinkets the house afforded were employed to decorate this room; her most successful drawings hung on its walls, and the embroidered table-cover was her own design, which she had industriously worked at all through the long winter, for the occasion.

On this evening, therefore, in the contemplation of her immediate happiness, Jane found the hours pass too quickly, and was well pleased to be undisturbed. But the next morning she felt dissatisfied at disappointing Caroline, and by way of reparation thought it well to set out for Middleton Lodge at once after breakfast.

It had rained during the night, and the ground was wet; nevertheless she selected a path that from immediately behind the cottage led up the wooded ascent on the other side of which was Middleton Lodge. It was shorter than by the road, and much pleasanter; running above the wood through open pastures, now gray with rising exhalations. The lark was rippling high into the white light, and the startled rabbits fled like brown shadows over the ragged boundary fence, as she went on through the silent morning, stopping to catch the sonorous breath of the greedy cattle cropping the deep pasture, or to watch the huge vapours roll off from the face of the rising sun. Each familiar feature of the old walk seemed new, and worth observing on that misty morning; so that it was long before Jane reached the shrubbery bounding the gardens of Middleton Lodge. The descent of wood recommenced from thence, and over the blue pine tops were views of the Orme, far underneath; its course tracking through the great elms of the meadow away to the Everley plantations in middle distance. The dreamy murmur of the salmon weir shoaling far away, the cooing of the wild pigeon along the wooded slopes, and the soft echoes of country sounds, mingled as Jane rested on the wicket leading into the shrubbery. Gradually a host of memories

came upon her then, and forced a glance backwards to the past : that forbidden past, long ago sealed up and set aside for ever ; for sympathies were linked with Middleton Close which awakened of themselves, bringing a train of melancholy and regret. It had been the haunt of her earlier years, in the happy time when the future unfolded an untarnished vision, and life seemed but a long summer holiday ; when the deep inner life of the great woods was keenly felt : when often on this very spot she had come to enjoy their mysterious treasures—to see the acorn drinking cups that the elves had cast away, the fairy mounds and giant toad-stools, and to gather gleaming coral bracelets from the pale mountain ash.

Yonder, in the holly, was the linnet's nest, and here the brightest wild flowers grew, as they grew still, at her feet. Alas ! those bunches of flaming crocus, bursting through the damp leaves and rotting fungi, how bitterly they looked up through the blank of wasted years, recalling her blighted youth and the rich sum of its fair chances which had come to nothing.

The rising clouds gathered and settled in upon her mind by degrees, blotting out the peaceful beauty of the actual scene ; Jane was thus fast losing herself in thought, when accidentally, a raven came

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flapping through the fir branches so close overhead as almost to scatter the falling cones upon her, and immediately the noise recalled her. "So unwise yet," she murmured, rising and resuming her walk; then "so heedless as to suffer vain retrospection to disturb the balance of a mind no longer excused even by youth or inexperience. Why should I escape the common burden, when the very happiest must repine on looking behind? Vanity is a condition of all earthly promises, and mine is only the common lot. Even were it otherwise, were mine a peculiar case, I possess extraordinary reasons for greater resolution." So entirely engaged was her mind in this way, that inadvertently she had crossed the pleasure-ground, and before perceiving her mistake, went slightly astray by entering the main avenue from an outlet in the shrubbery lower than the direct path to the house. On turning up the ascent, however, to repair the error, she met a mounted servant coming towards her.

This circumstance immediately caused an end of all interior conflict, and at once; the impetus of her feelings ceased. She stood looking after the man in sober surprise, for at the first view she had recognized the livery: not one in Ormiston but would have likewise recognized that livery. What could

the meaning of it be? Jane wondered, remembering the reports concerning Caroline, what business could a servant of Mr. Bradel's have at Middleton Lodge?

## CHAPTER V.

## CONFIRMED.

IMMEDIATELY rounding the wing of the building, Jane gained the front of the house, and found Caroline standing in the raised drawing-room window, so wholly engaged with a bunch of beautiful flowers as not immediately to perceive her arrival.

Framed by the large window, her graceful figure made a pretty picture; but the head looked small for her slenderness and height, and her features, though regular and finely modelled, were wanting in the thoughtful repose inseparable from the highest type of beauty; still the expression was less feeble than gentle, and on the whole it was an attractive and decidedly an agreeable face.

Seeing her friend she was out at once, and in a breath commenced to complain of yesterday's disappointment.

"I suspect, nevertheless, that my absence was very fortunate," Jane said in reply. "See the hol-



land is off the drawing-room, and that means fine company. Clearly, then, you intended to entrap me into meeting strangers, and I have had a lucky escape. Why did you keep that a secret? and whose servant passed me just now in the avenue?"

"The messenger with the flowers, perhaps; for they have only just arrived: see! such wonderful flowers!" said Caroline, colouring slightly, and speaking with rapidity. "It all happened in this way: I chanced to refer to the gardens at Farren Court, and then Mr. Bradel said he could show flowers to beat Farren Court; and indeed it is a fact: they are most beautiful. But did I not say Mr. Bradel was to be here? I thought I told you, I certainly intended doing so. Indeed we had quite a party—an impromptu party—Miss Fletcher, Mr. Pennet, the Drakes: you had a decided loss."

"Are you serious that Mr. Bradel was here yesterday?" asked Jane, with grave surprise.

"Come! I'm sure you knew of it all along. Besides I wanted to tell you yesterday, but you *would* not allow it. Remember I said there were secrets you would learn if you came; and you would have had a most agreeable evening also: just a pleasant sort of thing, games, and the cotillon. Mr. Pennet held the forfeits, and was so really smart

at giving the answers ; he asked for you also, why you were not present : you were greatly missed. Indeed, Miss Fletcher wants you to learn Italian, as she has just begun, and spoke to me about it ; she says it is such fun and so easy, and I agreed to learn it if you did, so we must see about it : though if it is any trouble I won't, of course."

Jane did not reply ; and the seriousness of her face made Caroline feel ill at ease, though she laughed it aside, saying,—

"It is well at all events, to have you on any terms, and I am determined you shall be good-humoured for once. So how shall we pass the morning ? Suppose we go in to the drawing-room to inspect my pole screen ; I have made great progress with it, and you can assist to select the worsteds, about which there is a difficulty at present ; or if you prefer visiting the garden first, you may scold me for neglecting the flowers : it will amuse you, I suppose, to lecture me, and indeed I have neglected them of late, and am getting heartily tired of our wilderness of a garden. But come round to the coach-house, now, and I'll show you the young pigeons, and the little poodle puppy Mr. Pennet sent out to mamma."

"I must know seriously, Caroline, why you wanted me here yesterday ?"

"Perhaps because I knew that you would not come."

"Plainly, what is going on at present?" persisted Jane, "and why is the very last person you should know at all familiarly introduced into your house? You do not forget the past; you are neither, I presume, so blind, nor so careless of self-respect as to seek to renew it; yet, coupled with what is said of you already, the fact of *his* being one evening here, particularly in such an uncereemonious way, is enough to send your name all over the town. Where is your mother's prudence, your own pride? Would you like to be pointed at? to have the gentleman bored by the girl who was dying for him, and yawning that some one might come to marry her out of his way, as he said of poor Lucy Swanton? You would like that, no doubt."

"It is well to be on one's guard," replied Caroline, in a tone of pique. "I had no idea there was anything very serious in mamma's happening to ask a gentleman to dine, and I am much obliged for the caution, though I think you make a rout about nothing: just as if a gentleman can make a girl ridiculous unless she first let him; and if so it is her own fault: she deserves to suffer for it then. Should such ever be my fate, let my own words con-

demn me; be sure I shan't shirk the consequences. But fortunately here comes mamma to interrupt your humour, and to scold you in your turn."

In truth Caroline was not displeased to have her mother arrive just then.

"Jane, I am so glad to see you: why didn't you come last night? we waited till the last moment," said Mrs. Middleton, a short dressy woman, bristling with ribbons, who emerged from a pantry as they entered the hall. "I counted on having you; and indeed we were badly off—just one girl too little for a quadrille. However, we enjoyed ourselves amazingly, and it was your own loss. Caroline, take these things up to the long room" (placing a tray of china upon the hall table), "and see Julia about the table linen; count over the dessert service also, it will save me trouble. There! go at once, Jane won't mind waiting; and look for my keys in the dressing-room, somewhere under the cabinet. Above all, take care not to leave the drawers open in the long room: Jane shan't go till you return. It was to get rid of her," she added, entering the drawing-room as Caroline went. "I want to have a talk with you, to tell you of our luck last night: you will scarcely believe it, I know, and no wonder; but it happened in this way. First, Mr. Bradel arrived the other day to look at a horse

which Middleton had to sell, and afterwards came in to lunch; Mr. Pennet was with him—they are always together now—and I asked Mr. Pennet to dine: as I intended to do all along, we having Sarah Fletcher and others engaged for yesterday; but I had scarcely done so, than it felt awkward not to include Mr. Bradel in the invitation, he being by; so the next moment I asked him also to make one of the party, and he accepted. Caroline has told you of that already, I suppose.”

Jane answered quietly that she had.

“And what do you think—for how many people in Ormiston would Mr. Bradel do as much, quite unceremoniously mind, and declare he had passed a pleasant evening also, as I overheard him say myself to Sarah Fletcher? To Mr. Pennet indeed, I can never feel sufficiently grateful; such an acquisition! a most accomplished young man; what a pity he has chosen the church—the church without connection—he is quite thrown away in it. Mr. Bradel, however, may do something for him by-and-by: they are inseparable. But congratulate me: have I not reason for pride? Though you are such an icicle, nothing ever sends you up,” Mrs. Middleton added impatiently. “It is a distinction, I say, and if people will talk of it, let them: it is something to talk of.

Some in Ormiston would cut their tongues out to have so much to say. And the Bradels are much maligned; I for one could never discover the Bradel pride: it is just because they are not hand and glove with every one, and it would be most unreasonable to expect that. There is not on the whole a kinder family in the county—one which gives so much in charity, much to my own knowledge that they never get credit for. And the young man surely does his best to be agreeable: if you had seen him last night! though he is, to be sure, lively and careless; just the sort of open character that jealousy might easily slander; but those stories one hears are all exaggerated, and half untrue: even concerning Caroline, there was not at all as much in that as people said at the time; and if there were, he is greatly improved since, and has seen more of the world. Two years make a difference at his age, and as far as my own experience goes I will say, that a politer and a better mannered young man I never met. For instance, only last night, because Caroline happened to talk about flowers, he makes the conversation an excuse for sending us a most beautiful bouquet this morning. Was not that polite? Not a word before her, however," Mrs. Middleton added, interrupting herself, as here the door opened and Caroline entered.

“Jane has had a scolding for disappointing us,” she continued, addressing her daughter, “and I am determined to keep her here now : it is the least she can consent to in atonement. I don’t see either what she wants at home at all : that she shan’t return this day, at all events, is settled.”

If only consulting her own desires, Jane would have resisted this arrangement ; but it involved more than mere inclination. She saw that her presence was necessary, that it was important to have a talk with Caroline immediately, and therefore she consented to remain at the lodge.

## CHAPTER VI.

## FIRST BEGINNINGS.

LUKE PENROSE kept faith with himself at last, and returned to attempt his career again, if not successfully; he determined to make an effort that would secure self-approval, at least, and be worthy in some degree of his own honest purpose. Success, indeed, seemed beyond hope at first; the difficulties before him had grown so formidable, and were exaggerated tenfold by his high temper and over-sensitive disposition. There were for instance his companions in the office, the sneering junior clerks, to face; he had to bear their stinging and scarcely covert smiles when first he bent to the desk and began the weary work of feigning business all through the long office hours, with nothing whatever to do the while: for the books of which he once had charge had been some time handed over to others. Then the fussy industry affected on purpose to deepen the contrast of his own unemployed condition; not only the osten-



tatious application of the scribbling clerks, but the chilling stare of old Dotter's horn spectacles talking at him as plainly as glasses could speak: "Hey? young sir, with your gold ring on your finger, and hair curled proud as ever, what do you want here? what business have we for such a very fine gentleman as yourself?" they seemed to say.

If Dotter had but recognized his existence, and put forth his hand in mere common brotherhood with an offer of the morning paper, or of his old greasy snuff-box, it would have been an act of priceless courtesy to Luke then. A civil look or smile, some small show of sympathy in his beggared condition, a few crumbs of bare charity, was all he pleaded for; but it was too much, he was spotted with disgrace: from him nothing could be expected in return; he was down, and Dotter accordingly preferred lifting his shoe at him, as people (and not the very worst either) are seen to do occasionally: it being, we fear, established but too well, that a good man may be very good indeed, without of necessity being altogether a good Samaritan.

"It was his own doing: surely he was idle and foolish; and if temptation crushed him, it was no doubt his own fault. Why be so frail and human? Look at me! had I his advantages? Had he been

but diligent like me, worked like me, with credit and honour, with fidelity and honesty like me. Compare my condition now with that helpless, broken bankrupt there, and see the difference. Come, let us spit upon him! forgiveness is not nominated in the bond: and, beggar, let him pay the forfeiture."

The Pharisees, therefore, with whom Luke had to do, were confirmed in self-righteous malice, and left him to extricate himself as he might: indeed, if the assistants in the office had expressly banded themselves for the purpose, they could not have annoyed him with more success at first. But in the end even his very helplessness brought a kind of aid, for the very pride that exposed him to the most trifling impertinence, roused his manliness at last, and called out the full vigour of his nature, and a dogged strength of purpose grew out of it: a resolution not to be beaten—that neither persons nor circumstances should bend him from the path he had chosen, or from the successful execution of his own predetermined will. In this way it resulted that even the very difficulties which opposed him turned at last in his favour, and became a powerful leverage in helping him onward.

One morning it happened, as Luke hurried through the streets on his way to the office, that a

tall, dark man emerged from a shop, and laid his hand on his shoulder. This was Lumney, a distant connection of the Troyes, and his oldest friend.

“Though I have not seen you for some time, I have heard enough about you,” said Lumney, walking on with him, “you can understand, therefore, what a satisfaction it must be to my intelligence to perceive you at last turn out as great a fool as I always maintained you were. The complicated ingenuity of man, and the diversity of human ambitions, sometimes defy analysis. You may remember the alderman in ‘Don Quixote,’ who practised the act of braying with such distinction as ultimately to surpass even an original ass in proficiency? And there is a sublime inconsistency in all you undertake; quite a brilliancy in the excess of your successive failures, that not only defies investigation but even challenges a kind of respect—makes one hope for you a very high place as a genius for folly of the first rank, and that is something. Your last quarrel with old Dacer is all over the town: some say that you have got notice to quit, and of course it must come to that at last; but what your object was in bringing the old gentleman to bay—why you were not satisfied with digging the mine under your feet without springing it too—must be unintelligible

to any one less versed than I in the amazing incongruity of everything you do. Though what you mean to arrange after the blow up, when the curtain closes on the grand finale, beats even me to determine; and I should thank you to instruct me on the point forthwith."

Luke laughed.

"If your ears had been as ready to receive good news as malicious gossip," he said, "you might have learned that our quarrel has since been made up, and that Mr. Dacer and I were never better friends. You will smile if I talk about turning over a new leaf; but it is the truth this time: not that I am going to begin as usual, but positively that I have actually done it."

"Done what?"

"Done with playing the fool, and mean to mind my business now."

"Capital! 'mean to mind:' the phrase is Luke Penrose to a shade: always big with some new project that extinguishes in splutter. However, don't mean minding anything for another week or so," added Lumney, "as I happen just now to want you specially. It will make no difference of course; one week is as good as another to begin anything one doesn't like in, and at the end of a year, a week

more or less won't be missed. We have a party going up to Milton Craggs for a few days, Boyce and Slingsby, in my drag; so put off your amendment and come with us: we leave on Thursday."

By this they had reached Mr. Dacer's office, and Luke turned up the steps.

"I have resisted a worse devil in the shape of an invitation to the Marlfield pic-nic, already, and, fiend, I defy you," he replied. "There are old Dotter's glasses eyeing me from behind the wire blind; so, good morning, at once. I must go, and, if possible, will look down to you this evening." He disappeared through the baize doors of the office.

"That boy will certainly come to good, though he has done nothing but make mistakes yet," Lumney muttered, continuing his walk slowly towards the more crowded end of the town. "And all the better; nothing comes of those fellows who never go wrong, like that confounded Thresham—Councillor Thresham that is now, who, they say, by-the-by, has maligned Luke to old Dacer. If I could but convict him of it once, the double-tongued interjectional rogue! His mother had a snuff shop in Bridge Alley. A fellow of old saws and mouldy logic; a lisping fantastico; an emphatic shaveling, who, at school, brushed his clothes and saved his pocket money; a mouthing nothing,

clad in cast quotations; a village virtuoso, nice in trade, pictures, and cheap crockery; a whig, a bigot, a teetotaler. He will very likely be mayor next year, and if I don't lampoon him in the *Argus*, 'tis because I formerly hunted with his uncle, old Rhoddy: and a very good fellow, though rather a bad boy he was, not at all akin to this faded example of diluted methodism."

As communing with himself thus, Lumney passed along the street, a stranger would at once have observed his appearance; but it was not so much the remarkable muscular figure, the broad clear brow, with angular set features, conveying an impression of equal power both of intellect and frame, which he would have noticed at first; for there was an expression more attractive far than mere power in that masculine, swarthy face; something in the deep gray, quiet eye, most strange to find there; a softness, not kindly only, but gentle, even femininely delicate. Altogether, it was a striking face, which would have challenged attention anywhere; yet, as he loitered along now, with his usual listless air, no one heeded nor gave him a second glance, for who was there in town or neighbourhood that did not know Lumney? He was a recognized institution, an appurtenance, a well-known household feature of

Ormiston ; one of those remarkable men who never have done, nor never will do anything : not at all for want of qualities either of intellect or character, but precisely on account of their very range and compass ; for even it was admitted that, if Lumney applied exclusively to any one pursuit, he would certainly attain an easy success therein ; but the difficulty lay in exactly hitting on the one thing for which he was to abandon his other tastes : and he had already turned forty, without deciding that necessary point. Indeed, the broad cultivation and capacity of his mind stood most seriously in his way ; for the multitude of things he could put his hand to on a moment's notice was amazing : if the *Argus* wanted a pungent article, or *Sacrum*, of the academy, an idea for a picture, or Quartette, the singer, selections for his annual concert, Lumney's aid was surely looked for ; it was he that picked a barbarism in the Greek ode published by the great Cambridge Fellow, the mighty Blunderbole, and the phrenologist, Miss Bas, Miss Blue, the geologist, had both of them constant smiles for Lumney. " My brain is an old garret," he used to say, " where all sorts of odds and ends and useless lumber are tumbled out of the way—a musty store-room that no one goes near until something is lost ; and until one does open a shutter and

let in the daylight, I can never half tell what is in there myself."

A man of his capacity and leisure thrown amidst an active, intelligent society, necessarily acquired extensive power of a certain class, and in consequence, though nominally popular, he was secretly disliked and feared by many; for he was in the way of all irregular and tortuous careers, and by an opportune "mot" had more than once crushed the fortunes of an unlucky social aspirant. At a glance one saw that he was a man of significance in his generation; and when on this occasion, after leaving Luke, he appeared in the drawing-room of his club, his advent was a popular fact interesting to the entire room: the occupant of his favourite seat by the window took the first decent pretext to vacate it, and the men whom he addressed in passing looked up pleasantly and answered with smiling cordiality.

The room was greatly crowded this forenoon, and the noise unusual; parties constantly entered, talking with a loudness hostile to general comfort; so that the sanctity of the place was gradually invaded, and Lumney, to whom a lounge over the morning papers was a necessity of existence, became accordingly annoyed. But in a while, when secure of his paper, of his easy chair, and of his window—when in pos-



session of all which at the moment he desired—his temper easily cooled again, and he finally settled in his berth, moralizing on the folly of letting anything upset one in this world. For “there is always a fair side to the worst of things:” he added, “even my own condition, unenviable and isolated as it may seem, is on the whole little to complain of: if possessing little, I have then the less to lose, and time has at least been negatively kind; for if not adding much it has not greatly subtracted from my account either, but leaves me still in the club window of twenty years ago, in view of the same sunny pavement full of life and youth, and holiday feathers, as if life were but a joke, and the only task were to enjoy it freely, and there were no burdens to carry, webs to weave, or work to do.”

Here, however, a renewal of disturbance, caused by the noisy entry of a party of young men, abruptly interrupted his soliloquy.—“Mr. Bradel was wanted immediately: where was he? A difficulty had arisen about the race ball: the assembly rooms were engaged for the night. Had any one seen Bradel?”

“The house must stand on end of course, because you boys choose to give a ball; we old fellows are not to be considered,” Lumney said to Captain Seaton, who then came near the window, directing

attention to Edwin Bradel, at the moment seen opposite, coming in the direction of the club. A circumstance, however, arose at the moment to alter his evident intention; Mrs. Middleton and her daughter suddenly appeared up a cross street in his way, when Bradel stopped, joined them, and ultimately turned back again with them.

"Bagged!" cried Captain Seaton: "Mother Middleton has the bird. An end of him now for the day, though we are here by appointment. A man so rich lets the world wait. It ruins one's manners to have a bank at your back."

"A snare some of us will escape then," said Slingsby; "I'll skim that reef: my politeness remains green to the last."

"There is a sort of man that can't be spoiled, you know," retorted Lumney.

"If good fortune would only try, however," returned Slingsby, "I'd lend it every assistance."

"Easier to mend your purse than your manners, decidedly."

"I'll owe you for that, at all events."

"Then you won't pay, Harry?"

"Blot out the score with a double or quit," suggested Seaton; "or offer him a check."

"The way of the army, I believe," answered

Slingsby : "and one must sometimes do like others."

"Which is an excuse always for doing wrong," pronounced Lumney.

"An excuse thrown away on me, then ; for I do that without any. But concerning Bradel ; you have heard the report, no doubt ?"

"Heard as the cuckoo is in June, Harry, but not regarded," replied Lumney.

"The Bradels are people of to-day," sneered Seaton, yawning.

"To be as rich, we'd all of us willingly be people of even to-morrow," retorted Lumney.

"I lay at all events to any figure that he has not a notion of her ; what do you think ?"

"Perhaps that human nature is pretty much the same everywhere, especially at Everley Hall."

"Then he won't marry her."

"There is for and against it."

"Which are you for ?"

"Decidedly for the comfortable perusal of the morning papers," answered Lumney ; "for you boys to adjourn to your pleasures, and leave a desolate old gentleman to the sole enjoyment of his solitary existence. I wish you good-morning."

## CHAPTER VII.

## DIFFICULTIES.

JANE TROYE was at first disappointed about her sister's return, for her father (a retired naval officer who passed his life in experiments on gunnery, more interesting to himself than productive of advantage to his family) had become fascinated by the testing of some new projectiles then going on in London, and remained there longer than was intended. It was many days later therefore before their departure from town was finally announced; a delay which gave Jane full leisure to observe the extent of mischief that Caroline Middleton had already done herself.

For meanwhile the progress reports had made concerning her, was considerable. She had been seen walking with Mr. Bradel in the street. It was known that Mr. Bradel had dined at Middleton Lodge. Miss Fletcher told friends in strict confidence that she had seen things she would not speak of for the world. So the eager public had for awhile

an agreeable topic, a shrewd woman like Mrs. Middleton to talk about; one who was always the first to remark on others: and that she should have fallen into so egregious an error gave unmixed general delight—an error which perhaps nothing but the absurd inconsistency of her subsequent conduct could equal in extent. The motives of that, indeed, were impossible to appreciate: either she had recognized her mistake, was tired of having her daughter's name on every tongue, and, remembering the previous attentions of the gentleman, resolved he should not play fast and loose again; or else it was as a matter of policy only, that she seemed to discourage Mr. Bradel's advances—in the hope, perhaps, of having them thereby more decidedly offered. People are frequently hottest for what is least easy of attainment, and that might have been her intention; it was certain, at all events, that she at once appeared as decidedly cold to his attentions as before she had seemed to court them; for she suddenly took every opportunity of avoiding him, even of preventing Caroline from meeting him, and when he called at the lodge she deliberately and repeatedly denied herself.


To Caroline this change was of all least intelligible, and she bitterly complained to Jane of her mother's

inconsistency : "If mamma," she said, "prefers that I should not meet Mr. Bradel, why persist in forcing me to every public place where I am sure of seeing him?"

It needed, indeed, but little observation to become aware that, if Caroline's affections were not engaged, her vanity at least was strongly touched by Mr. Bradel's attentions, and that she suffered from their withdrawal.

But to this Jane said nothing ; she abstained as far as possible from the topic, and further than expressing sincere sympathy and affection for Caroline, declined to meddle. She had done all that was possible to warn her friend ere it was too late ; and satisfied that she had, she abandoned herself freely to the more agreeable interests which were now approaching attainment : to the anticipated pleasure of having Nora home.

It was on the day immediately before her sister's return, Jane was later than usual in the garden, when Lumney's appearance at the gate interrupted her work. He had come from the range of hills above Middleton Lodge, and brought in his hand a branch of oak encrusted with a sort of red fungus, to which after a few words of greeting he called attention : he had found it in the south plantation, and had hopes of its furnishing a paper at the next meeting of the



scientific society. "For anything so simple must surely puzzle the local savants," he added; then, proceeding to animadvert on the condition of Jane's flowers, "This garden," he said, "appeared always in fallow: there is evident perseverance, but no result: constant weeding and raking, abundant leaves, and beds of hopeful seedlings, that, like fine promises come to nothing. Certainly it does more credit to your industry than to your skill. How is it you never have anything to show?"

"One reason is, that our old gardener has been laid up with rheumatism this month," said Jane.

"So much the better: you will never do good till you get rid of him. How those laurels overcrowd—and there! another arbutus clipped at the top, in flat contempt of my instructions," added Lumney, pushing aside with his cane a mass of straggling branches: "hacked like a quince in autumn: it will never recover, and I expressly forbade him to put a knife near that shrub: the barbarous old dotard!"

"Mr. Farren's gardener the other day recommended that all the shrubs in that square should be thinned for air: that is the reason of it," answered Jane; "and as for the flowers, the season is late this year: besides there are so many broken panes in the greenhouse that half our plants perished during

the frost; and moreover, so many things were to be done for Nora's return that I had not time of late to mind the garden. However, in another month I shan't be ashamed to have you see it."

"I shall perhaps come to dine some time during the week; very likely on Wednesday," Lumney answered. "I found a curious manuscript at a book-stall the other day, filled with legends of the old town and cathedral; and must have a night with your father over it: let him send me word when he is in the vein. So Nora is to leave school already; what an age we must be! it seems only the other day she was running about this very walk; a little imp the height of my knee, with glowing cheeks and eyes like a ripe blackberry. Do you remember her spirit, the day she drove her hand through the glass door of the greenhouse only because I defied her to do it; and how she laughed in my face when I told her stories that would have frightened another child into fits? That girl will make a noise in the world, depend upon it: there is something in her."

"She is very clever indeed," assented Jane; "such letters as we get from her. Last month she sent an account in verse of their distribution of prizes; a squib full of spirit, and perhaps a little malicious, because none of the prizes came to her share: though



it is her own fault. Mrs. Griffin says if she studied she would be first in everything. I am afraid she is very idle."

"So much the better; a woman is never quite so foolish as when she happens to know something," answered Lumney. "By the way, however, have you seen Luke lately? he rather avoids me."

"Not for many days. I have, indeed, but little hope of him now: I fear he never will succeed."

"Why not?" Lumney nipped a long water-shoot from a standard rose near. "A man who tries again in spite of continual failure not succeed! what is life but a tissue of such trials, a perpetual recommencement? whoever has courage to last to the end must win—and Luke will. I hope for him everything that his best friends can wish, and have good grounds for doing so, as I also lately had an interview with Mr. Dacer on his account, and the old gentleman spoke with such kindness of him that I changed my opinion of Dacer on the instant. It is easy, you know, to see people in another light when they respect our prejudices and adopt our views; and from a coarse, purse-proud, over-bearing trader, Dacer has suddenly become in my eyes an estimable citizen and a credit to the town, deserving of civic honours and general respect: indeed from the beginning, Luke and he would have

done very well but for the venomous treachery of Thresham. The mishaps of others are 'judgments,' according to that self-righteous pharisee, whose sour intolerance would have every one attend vapid tea-meetings and forgather with his own peculiar clique."

"Luke keeps his word, then, at last?"

"Yes."

"Is Mr. Dacer satisfied with him? Tell me everything: I will write to his mother to-night."

"He is doing his duty like a man of principle and honour," affirmed Lumney, "as well as I always knew he would; he is giving satisfaction to every one, and likely to prove a credit to his relatives and friends."

"This is good news indeed: will he come to see us soon?"

"I think not; he even keeps away from me at present, and very properly. When a man feels resources sufficient in himself to achieve a difficult task, he had better fasten into it at once, without consulting anybody."

And here the conversation changed; Lumney discovered other things to notice in the garden, and continued to inspect and find fault until the six o'clock bells of the town warned him of the hour.

He then went, promising to make Luke come to the cottage at the first opportunity—a promise that some days afterwards he proceeded to fulfil, and found his friend most resolutely opposed to. “I won’t see Jane again of my own accord,” Luke said, “until she can find another topic than the rehearsal of my own enormities to entertain me with; for flesh and blood can’t bear it for ever. Her remonstrance has often brought me to the point of committing some extremity of folly out of pure experiment, just to convince her that I was not half as bad as might be.”

“She does not like you worse for your faults, depend upon it. Jane is a most excellent person, but remember only a woman after all; and it is the way of these poor women, they are ever for leading or bending us one way or the other: nothing upsets them like perfection. If you had no vices, no weakling frost-bitten virtue-buds just perishing for want of feminine care, she would not care about you. But you are a kind of garden to her, now, and she has a right to keep you in order, to rake up the beds, and root the weeds out: there is pleasure in the act of rooting out, that only a woman can understand.”

“But is it fair to hack and hoe merely for the sport of handling the instruments?” returned Luke.

"I'll keep out of her reach certainly until she finds some other soil to work upon."

"She might find a more grateful soil, indeed," answered Lumney. "However, like all good-for-nothing fellows, you have the best of luck; fancy, with regular daily work to do, how it must shorten the day and make you sleep: the *dolce far niente*, believe me, is much overrated; I have tried it myself, as fairly as any one, yet it has nothing in it. There is a certain amount of dishonour in admitting so much, in secret even; but, between friends, if somebody were to find me something to do—and moreover, make me do it—I should not be very sorry."

"That would be easier said than done, I suspect," said Luke, smiling; "but it is true that the long hours and office stool come quite easy now: custom has overcome custom, and I amble smoothly in my harness at last. Shall I dine with you on Sunday?"

"No, for you go out to the Troyes—you *will*: I have settled it," repeated Lumney, "for I intend sending my manuscript by you, as I have changed my mind and don't intend going myself. Besides, Nora is come back, and you must see her—it is right you should: they will expect it of you, so out you go. I will send my parcel to-morrow evening."

## CHAPTER VIII.

## RENEWED ACQUAINTANCE.

WHETHER or not influenced by Lumney, on that Sunday Luke did go to the cottage. This time he had not to complain of his reception, and on her return from Mocton church he was presented to his cousin Nora.

“Do you think her altered?” Jane asked. “Except for her height and dress, I find her the same, and scarcely older: her expression is quite unchanged.”

“Not a trace of her remains to my mind: I should not have recognized her,” was the reply. “Is it the original, or a substitute? If the latter, indeed we have gained by the exchange; for Nora was not much to boast of, and this fine lady will prove an advantageous, a highly creditable connection: she certainly might have been taller, but on the whole it is a fair height, and everything considered, is in appearance at least a satisfactory person. Welcome, Nora! I re-

joyce to have you home again, and trust we may agree better than long ago : you recollect the days of our youth and its innocent pastimes. Can you forgive my cruelty to your dolls ? and is your dread of black-beetles as lively as formerly ? ” As he spoke, Mrs. Troye appeared, and they all entered the house ; for on Sundays the dinner hour was early.

Nora Troye interested one at once ; if not strictly beautiful, hers was certainly an attractive face, that attracted still ; but with diminished interest on closer examination, for one felt then somewhat disappointed at finding not less but more than was expected there. Like a fine engraving, which at a distance appears of the highest finish, but the broad handling of which, on closer view, gives an impression of power rather than of softness ; so her features, though perfect in outline and texture, were of too full proportions to be truly feminine, and a depth of light in the large round liquid eyes was brilliant and beautiful rather than pleasing. Yet the intensity of the expression did not at all approach to coarseness ; her lips, if something full, were perfectly modelled, of the most delicate colour, and the pure even white of her complexion harmonized well with the splendid hair which folded down in bands of brilliant black over her round throat and perfect shoulders.

She was not, perhaps, as beautiful as Caroline Middleton; certainly not at all as pretty, at least so it seemed to Luke on that first meeting; but otherwise there was no comparison: for in every higher quality, in readiness of wit, fertility and cultivation of mind, she, in his opinion, far excelled any one he had ever seen.

The calmness of the evening, and Nora's impatience to see the old features of the country again, induced Jane to propose a walk to Mocton Cross after dinner: it would be light enough to get views of the river from the Cross point, and even to make out the outline of the distant Everley woods. So the cousins set out along the pleasant Mocton road, with its tall hedgerows of budding hawthorn shedding fragrance through the moist April twilight. In high spirits, their voices and laughter ringing far out into the quiet fields, they went as fast as Luke's repeated interruptions would permit; at every turn he found out something new, a change or feature of the landscape to notice, an incident of social life to relate to Nora. For news of the world she was about to enter was interesting to her; and he had full scope to exercise his wit and harmless sarcasm in portraiture of the various celebrities and leading features of Ormiston circles.

"Not ~~that~~ I care to know anything of the world in a wider sense, anything beyond our own limits here," she said; "as such knowledge I believe to be the greatest ignorance, no less than the abjuration of every high impulse, descent to the mean level of general frivolity and emptiness. No! my aim shall be small happiness and modest hopes; which rightly understood are great things: an obscure, quiet life is exactly what suits me, and to that I look forward—just what home offers: the garden, a few books, a dance now and then for change, and Jane to take care of me; that is all. The less one looks away I believe the better; for happiness stands in the centre, and a narrow circle must approach it closest. As for the rest I am very ignorant of the world now, and hope to remain so always."

"It is exactly," Luke answered, "because of ignorance itself that you hold that opinion; although I admit that ignorance is the best of all safeguards to a strong impression. It is certainly not wise to examine too closely into the merits of a cherished prejudice; knowledge often puzzles and puts one out, as some of the old landscape painters said of nature: and ignorance and inexperience materially strengthen conviction. Life to me, however, wears any but a gloomy aspect as yet, and I should



be well satisfied with it under certain conditions, which the longer I live appear the more attainable; so, 'until they can find me some happier planet, more social and bright,' I am for the world, and the profuse variety of all its countless vanities to boot."

"The longer he lives, Jane! This piece of experience even I can remember when plundering jam crocks, and trembling at Dr. Blunderbole's rod."

"To be remembered at all was more than I counted on, it is evidence of interest at least."

"But you took care to make a lasting impression: one does not easily forget the sort of torment you were."

"All the better: an unfavourable impression rather than none."

"Right," said Nora at once, and her eyes leaped up like steel from the scabbard, "very right: better even be bad than insipid. But here is old Mocton Bridge again," she added, gently; "yonder the church spire shoots above the beeches of Farren Court, as in fits of home sickness at school I used to see it, when the thought of this quiet country came like a cool breeze over the hot flint sand of our melancholy playground. How the dreary hours lingered out there amidst the dust and glare of a confined court, where

the very shadows were of brick, and burnt one. Four pallid limes flagging away a thirsty life, formed the only green for the eye to rest upon; and outside it was worse still: the square Dutch town with its clipt gardens, and the miles of paved road, with dingy hissing factories on every side dotting the country slopes. It is pleasant to remember all that now, as the hooded evening folds over the old hamlet. Listen! There are the calves lowing on Hutton's croft?"

"Yes! and this is the Ealing—Ealing Ford," said Luke: "do you recollect your dread of the stepping-stones?"

"The Ealing indeed keeps its old tone yet," Nora answered, speaking as if to herself; "there it tinkles away to the smooth reach of the deep Orme yonder, where a fading gleam of sunset is mirrored still; and as they meet, see the brook pours all its little life away into the broad breast of the amber river, in ripples of pale gold, like the sunny ringlets of a laughing child hiding in its parent's bosom."

"But the light is going," said Jane: "see, how quickly the change comes?"

"Yes, already the last fan-like shafts of colour glint up into the sky; and the world is many tones more gray at once," Nora continued rapidly: "the fallows begin to seethe, and the denser air feels frosty; for

winter is but a short way off, and little would tempt him back again. Hush! now it is the gloaming; hear the brook shoal more sharply, the leaves move with the coming dew, and along the sloping marsh, see the timid water-fowl steal out.—What a pity we must return: suppose we go round by the common to see the alterations in the rectory that you wrote about last year?”

“It would be too far,” answered Jane, “besides there is nothing to see, as owing to Mr. Wilson’s health nothing has been done yet. The commissioners will not interfere until after his death: poor old man, he can’t last very long.”

“He has been lingering for the past year,” said Luke, “and Mr. Pennet expects to get the living when it falls. They say the Bradels have given him a promise; though that is doubtful: he has no more than a very good chance, and if he did not himself think so he would never remain so long in Ormiston. But it is really getting damp and cold, and we had better make haste back; Nora’s shawl is a light one.”

It was full dusk when they got home, and Mrs. Troye, vexed for Nora’s absence, peevish also that Jane should have left her alone the whole evening, kept every one uncomfortable until it was time

for Luke to set out for the town. But he did not mind; it was not in the power of things to damp his spirits then: he had that within to make the road seem short, and in spite of the warning town clock, he strolled up and down the city quays in the moonlight to work out his crowding thoughts. For imperial youth will have his wilful dreams, and will pile fair castles upon the hollowest shingle, with a smile at fate and adversity. Luke at once looked far ~~onward~~, and saw a host of bright possibilities all glowing in the warm rose tint of his fancy. No wonder that he trusted the fair illusive vision: for he was too young to know of failure in hope; and the sad knowledge that sees but mocking shadows in all the fine promises of this world, had not come to him yet.

From thenceforth a new era of happiness began for him, and almost his entire leisure was passed at the cottage. Each Sunday there were walks through Hamley wood almost alone with Nora; for Jane and Caroline being engaged with matters of their own, left the cousins much to themselves, and this new hope, daily growing more definite, and coming closer, also brought fresh strength to Luke; by giving him a still dearer object to struggle for. Everything at the time seemed so bright that it was

hard to doubt: the enchanter fancy worked so busily rearing up minaret after minaret of crystal and amethyst, until at length a glowing palace stood forth with towering crests glittering as the morning, with fountains of light dancing for ever in its fair white courts all filled with flowers and humming birds.

And why should he not also have his glittering day-dream? Wasn't it fitting and in due season? Does not every child believe them to be real kings and queens at the play? Let him enjoy the short act while it lasts. Wait until the curtain falls, and the lights are out, and the cold night settles down; then never doubt he will soon enough find it to be but glass and pasteboard: but poor make-believe frippery after all.


## CHAPTER IX.

## ANTICIPATIONS.

ON a morning before the race ball, Mrs. Middleton drove to the cottage on business no less important than arrangements of dresses and selection of festal finery ; she had offered to take Nora to the ball, and no time was to be lost: they were all to go into the milliner's together.

Ormiston as a matter of course was in the height of flutter just then, the hotels crowded with people from the ends of the county, for the Marquis of Delcomer, with the Marchioness, Lady Maria, and Lord Selwin, the heir, had come to stay at Everley for the races—a visit much talked of and long expected; moreover, one that caused great excitement and jealousy in the town amidst individuals of the class who by rank were entitled to hope for invitations to the state entertainments which followed.

The variety of detailed information indeed which




circulated about everything in progress at Everley during this time was remarkable.

What fine clothes Mrs. Bradel had ordered, what fine airs put on; how much the candlesticks, sent from Paris for the state chambers, had cost: fabulous candlesticks of inlaid malachite; how Lady Maria, who was thirty-four, and inclined to take Edwin, was accordingly all smiles and good humour: yet that her noble mother had with difficulty been talked into the visit, and made it distinctly felt that she was a descendant of a great North British house of sixteen quarterings.

This visit to Everley came just at the wrong moment, and interfered sadly with Mrs. Middleton's designs, for it was then exactly that everything was in the scales, and the merest trifle might influence Edwin Bradel's fancy, possibly altogether divert the marked attentions he had certainly commenced to pay Caroline; besides, a fear that she had overdone the thing herself by feigned coldness, which was just possible: indeed, and even appeared likely, for since the arrival of the Delcomers, neither Edwin himself nor even his friend Mr. Pennet had called once at the lodge: an important circumstance, when things were at such a delicate crisis that a slight movement either way of the index needle might indicate settled,

fair, or foul weather. The reports regarding Edwin and Lady Maria were also gaining strength every day, and besides, the Middletons had not been asked even to one of the state dinners given at Everley, though expecting it till the last moment. Certainly if one reckoned the signs of the times, prospects were so far gloomy; but Mrs. Middleton resolved not to do so until after the ball, which she secretly decided should settle everything. Caroline should be dressed for this ball as she was never dressed before; no telling what influence the dress of even one successful night might have; and as Mr. Bradel behaved to her daughter, there would she estimate the likelihood of her future *chances*.

It was certainly doubtful why Mrs. Middleton had volunteered to take Nora to this ball, as of course she shared, and in no small degree shared the natural matronly aversion to chaperon the daughters of others; but it might have been from mixed motives—to compliment the Troyes, or please Jane personally; or else as Nora was a novelty, if not a beauty, she might have thought it advantageous to have the bringing out of her at first. At all events Mrs. Middleton never acted without motive of some sort; so, no doubt, she had one in this, as in every other apparently disinterested action of her life.





She was not in the best of humours as they drove into town; for many trifles combined materially to ruffle her temper just then: the day was hot; and Nora, glowing with the excitement of anticipated pleasure, rather outshone Caroline, not only in spirits, but even in appearance, although her bonnet was unbecoming, besides Mr. Pennet had called yesterday at the cottage, and she (Mrs. Middleton) had not seen him for some time.

"Mr. Pennet was rather giving her up of late," she said; "he had so much finer acquaintance to occupy him at present. It was the fashion: what old people must expect." Nora's habit of incessantly looking out of the window was also a further provocation. "Just as if she had never had a drive before: what was the attraction? she passed that road every day without thinking of looking out of the window?" Nora's spirits were, indeed, at the moment incompressible; her delight concerning this ball could not be contained; and the most ordinary circumstances connected with it became topics of intense interest and value—the music, the hour of arrival, the number of people anticipated.

"Your calmness is provoking," she whispered to Caroline on the stairs at Madame Tuille's; "I have never seen myself dressed yet, and am dying of

curiosity. Jane was all night employed trying colours in my hair, and it is decided I am not to wear any at last; don't you think it best? somehow everything looks large and awkward, otherwise I should choose a complete wreath of orange or scarlet, certainly some strong colour."

"You will think less of these things by-and-by," Caroline answered gravely: "I could once feel so myself, but now your excitement is nearly unintelligible. Never doubt but experience will dispose of your illusions likewise; and, as in my own case, I fear much happiness attached to them which must vanish also."

"I am not afraid: the world cannot deceive me; for I don't set a high value on its favours, or expect more than it may easily bestow," was the reply. "I shall take it in my finger tips just awhile, and let go when the humour changes, or something better offers.—But there is your dress: what a perfect orange: amber, rather primrose than amber! and it is of so soft a tone; exactly the delicate tint for your subdued half light—what perfect harmony. How beautiful you will look, Caroline: like a spirit of morning, a Peri in the folds of a saffron cloud, you will be the queen of the room beyond any doubt."

Caroline laughed.

"Sovereignty has its drawbacks—question is it worth having; the weight of the jewel, perhaps, exceeds its brilliancy," she said.

"You think *le jeu ne vaut pas la chandelle*—I don't."

Here Mrs. Middleton introduced Nora to Madame Tuille, and after a few sentences, added confidentially,—“Smart enough: will pass for good-looking also, as girls go; but she is short and has no figure. If properly dressed, however, she may have a chance, as any novelty succeeds at first; but without a figure what can you do? what is a pretty face without something to set it on? only a blossom on a broomstick.”

Presently, when their business was over, Mrs. Middleton hastened back to the carriage, and was handed into it by Lumney. His appearance there was indeed a matter of pre-arranged accident; for having seen them arrive, he waited on purpose to meet Nora, and she was all radiant with smiles when he came up.

“I remember you very well, Mr. Lumney, she said; you were much with us long ago: and are an old friend or an old enemy, I forget which; though I never on any account forget either.” She thought him at the same time dreadfully dark and old, and

privately wondered that he could have ever been called good-looking.

"Anything but years, if you please; we old beaux dislike the topic of all things," Lumney answered, making a silent inventory of her person: "lips, brow, eyes, very good indeed; hair, polished ebony; decidedly a handsome woman; some pride, some temper: so much the better. But this hand, which although small appears large—strange! I like the hand least of all," and he let go her fingers.

"A gentleman need not care about age, in my opinion," Nora rejoined, briskly; "boys are for instance my horror; and I don't intend to dance with one of them at the ball. If his wisdom increase with years, a gentleman can't be old enough for my taste."

"I am sorry for you, then," returned Lumney, "as I have escaped the most decided attempts of my own time and beyond it. You will certainly but lose your time on me, as I am artful as well as aged, and have had, moreover, considerable experience."

"Nevertheless, you are in love even at this moment, I am sure," replied Nora: "and I will prove it: you confess to being an old bachelor."

"Unless for sake of argument, otherwise certainly not an *old* one."

"If old bachelor, then an idler, it follows as a matter of course; because without proper incentives to activity; and if an idler means a person with nothing to do, how can any one with nothing to do help falling in love, Mr. Lumney?"

"Apt, certainly."

"She has made good use of her time, you see," put in Mrs. Middleton, tartly: "our girls here are so reserved, so over-bred, that a novelty of any sort must be desirable; and you gentlemen have such range of taste, that Nora may at length prove a variety to your fancy. She may possibly have a short day of it, until something newer turns up."

"If only a short one it will be her own fault then," answered Lumney. "For when once a young lady acquires popularity of any sort, she has only not to meddle to retain it easily; it is generally in trying to equal the standard of her reputation that she betrays herself, and gets found out. It is amazing how easily every quality is conceded to one who confines herself merely to looking pretty and not saying too much: for really the first duty of a young woman is to be good-looking."

"Is to be married, Mr. Lumney," added Mrs. Middleton, laughing: "beauty may be an accessory after the fact; though it is a question, when you see the

matches that are made. On the whole, plain girls seem to do just as well, and certainly don't make such fools of themselves: perhaps because they don't get the chance; or if they do throw themselves away, nobody cares: 'tis not a sacrifice of the same value; but when a really handsome girl takes a beggarly half-pay Scotch captain, like poor Lucy McTaggart, it vexes every one: 'tis exactly like throwing so much money's worth into the river. But, it is noon already; we have a thousand things to do, and must settle the point some other time: besides, I am never sure what to make of you, Mr. Lumney; I always determine never to speak my mind before you, yet you have a sly, treacherous way of getting one to do it: nevertheless, you are a decidedly dangerous person," and with a smile she drove away.

Lumney stood alone on the pavement. "She is attractive, certainly not unladylike, perhaps clever, and decidedly a remarkable girl," he mused; "yet somehow I don't like her: she is not my kind—not what Luke wants, not what I want for him: she has too much power, too much will, and is something too strong for my taste—well to look at, to trifle with, but not to live with; not to marry. In whatever mould her character first casts, there it will fix and settle: and if ill, it will be very ill indeed;

she will follow to the end the path chosen, whether to the right or left, and the risk is great: much danger in the chance. Look well about you, Luke! take plenty of time, and take care while there is time."

Though Luke had not spoken a word of his feelings regarding Nora, Lumney had too great interest in him not to divine them already, and perhaps had secret projects of his own grounded on them; for he had long considered himself Luke's natural friend and protector, and in everything that concerned him took an interest his own affairs could never inspire him with.

## CHAPTER X.

## QUICK PROMOTION.

AT the race ball Nora Troye had unquestionably a striking success; if her dress, manners, airs, and affectation, were freely criticized by the rest of her sex, it was as freely admitted that she danced well and had handsome arms, and it was undeniable that a more brilliant *début* had never been made in Ormiston. "A circumstance, indeed, which proved nothing beyond the ascertained irrationality of mankind, and which in the end might turn out a dear distinction to the young person herself; perhaps give her notions to embitter the remainder of her days, and turn her head. Such being the natural and ordinary effect of a *coup-de-soleil* on an inexperienced brain." Maidens of undoubted experience in consequence compassionated her excessively, although at the same time asserting that her head had been already turned; as evidence of it, they averred that after refusing Mr. Bradel himself for a dance, Nora had stood



up with her penniless cousin, with whom she had been quite remarkable. Such an improbability, however, was esteemed an insult to the general understanding, and did not gain credit; as in truth it ought not, for Mr. Bradel did not ask her: he was far too occupied with his own affairs to bestow a thought upon her, too disappointed at finding that Caroline was not present. For the fact was, Caroline did not appear at the ball.

Although Mrs. Middleton had expected it to form a period in her speculations, to decide her future course of action by furnishing a key to appreciate Mr. Bradel's intentions; though it was the date whence the definite probability of her hopes was to be assumed or denied; nevertheless the ball arrived and passed without fulfilling even an item of its important promises, for on the day previous it was obviously quite impossible that Caroline could go to it, as she became seriously unwell, and the attack subsequently proved sufficient to confine her for many days. Mrs. Middleton was therefore excessively provoked, and additionally aggravated by hearing of Nora's complete success; who necessarily must have missed the ball also, if Jane had not at the last moment prevailed on an acquaintance to take charge of her sister.

But though the ball was a failure as far as her

expectations were concerned, though it did not of itself incline her nearer to certitude on either side, or diminish a scruple of suspense, still the disappointment was in fact perhaps the most fortunate accident in Mrs. Middleton's favour. Nothing so edges inclination as finding its object unexpectedly moved out of reach : a disappointment in the dinner-hour is a wonderful sharpener to the appetite; and no doubt Caroline's indisposition contributed much to consummate the ultimate fact which shortly followed. For Edwin Bradel had looked forward to meeting her at the ball, had counted on that opportunity, even had almost decided what to say to her then; consequently, his mind was fittest prepared to receive the entire shock of the disappointment of her absence, even though he learned afterwards the reason of it: the effect had been already produced, his feelings and his will being wrought by the delay to such a definite point as must insure positive action and result. So, in scarcely a week after the race ball, it was publicly known that Mr. Bradel had made a morning call at Middleton Lodge; that he spent the day, and dined there. Presently it was over Ormiston that he had proposed for Caroline Middleton.

Not that he admired, paid attention, was in love, or was thinking of the lady only—such things were of

insignificant daily occurrence; but that he formally declared, had made a tangible offer of himself and his possessions, and "was of course snapped at:" such was the news that rolled like a ball of fire through the town, and at every turn caused fresh consternation and commotion. Only to hear the pleasant things which were said when, the shock over, minds were calm enough for discussion: the clearness with which it was evident what Mrs. Middleton had been aiming at all along, "before he went to school, or was out of his jacket, every one saw that the old spider had her web out for him:" the universal commiseration for Mr. Bradel, the father, who, it was asserted, would not survive the cruel shock: the insignificant personal pretensions of Caroline, who was not to compare with Miss Dârel; nor was she as young either as they pretended. It was a secret blow to many a giddy brain that till the last moment had gone on quietly nursing its brood of silent longings, and at once found the nest rifled and its fond hope flown; and many turbaned brows, wrinkled with matronly care, clouded at the news.

At the club it was the common topic. The young gentlemen of the place were in no way inclined to grieve that the Colossus which had long overshadowed them and kept down their marketable value, "had at

last made up his mind and made away with himself," as Slingsby said; "there will be some enjoyment in going out once more."

"But there won't be any places to go to now," answered Lumney; "who cares for snap-apple when the apple is won, or only to catch such fry as you. Poor disappointed and forsaken maidens! For you, life has henceforth lost its bloom, and the world is dumb: resume again your weary sewing and your Berlin-work; practise industry and resignation, the homely virtues befitting your abandoned state; for your resource is gone. No more a fine young prince shall come prancing down the mall, no more watching or expectation, no further need to dress or look better than anybody else, to go to balls or to church any more. Go! all of you, be nuns at once; you may as well: this foolish globe is but stuffed with sawdust; the ball has stopped rolling, the game is played out, and over, and you have lost it. Women have but a few short years to win in the grand handicap of life; Slingsby, and can't afford to draw such blanks as you out of the lottery. If you've no money in your purse, Roderigo, then let Desdemona alone: it will save both time and trouble."

"Any girl worth having doesn't care about

money," answered Slingsby, languidly drawing off his gloves.

"Try to have that girl worth having, and you'll be wiser; if her own dainty fingers don't measure your purse, depend upon it she'll find a proxy to do it. Time was, perhaps, when any long-haired lotos-eater with a full baritone voice might have made his own terms; but the day is gone by for that, and you won't live long enough to see the fashion in again.

"It is a point to have done with Bradel, at all events," answered Slingsby. "Boyce calls him Basilisk, because when once he looks, no girl sees anybody else: he puts out her eyes.

"Dog in the manger! a lucky dog though," said Lumney.

"A spoil-sport."

"'Spoil five' is a fascinating and dexterous game. 'Tis pleasant to hinder others from the trick you don't want yourself. But, you silly person, to waste your happy spring, dangling after farthingales! wait, Harry: wait for your turn—when you have position and the gout, your uncle's Norfolk estate, a dyed whisker, and a red nose, then is the time to unstring your guitar and take to philandering, like old Toper there. See, yonder he goes with a rose in

his bosom. The very daughters of those sightless beauties you complain of now, will then find glances of melting tenderness for the absurd, besotted old rickety Silenus I expect you to become. Poor varnished Topper," Lumney continued, addressing the embroidered person of the colonel, riding down the street, "lumbago to-morrow, and a week's groaning for this fleeting hour of vanity. At the end of the circle, can you think to live it round again. You no more resemble your intention than a milliner's bouquet does the dewy buds of the parterre. Alas! for mortal pain, for the sighs of youth, and the regrets of age; the poisoned longing, the pitiful trying to pilfer back from time and tread over the old path again; shooting out devouring morning rays from the impatient East, yet at setting sadly shedding all the fairest light behind, lingering still in impotent resistance, to decline over the loved world which a cold destiny darkens. What is it?—what would we have, Slingsby? We motes in the sunbeam, giddy ephemera, circling without purpose, ever restless, ever weary; what do we seek?"

"Seaton soars to a wife with a fortune, but he is ambitious and greedy," was the reply; "if Providence would but send me some flat of an ensign to buy my old bay whistler, I should be content, and

joyfully turning to the passing moment exclaim, with Dr. Faustus, 'Stay, thou art so fair.'

"Want! there it is; whether of ensign or of wife, what matter, that is the pinch; and to slake this wolfish want the great world spins, and has already spun through weary centuries of failure. But you happy youths, are only laughing and I am a prosing dotard. There goes Luke Penrose, over the way." Lumney took his hat and went out.

Luke pushing rapidly through the crowded street turned evidently with surprise rather than welcome when Lumney joined; an unusual elegance in his dress was noticed immediately by the latter.

"Shining like a gaudy salmon-fly, curled like the Grecian Apollo, ambrosial and perfumed positively to raise the people, what is the meaning of it?" asked Lumney; "where are you going, and what is that about?" pointing to the valise he carried.

"Good-morrow; only to Mocton—to the Troyes. You heard the news about Bradel, of course; and what do you think of it?"

"Fortunately it is only to Mocton, then," said Lumney, reflectively, without answering. You will not therefore object to return with me to the picture sale at Hallam's, to see the whole Dutch school knocked down at so much a foot, and Thresham

moreover in his glory? It is a thing not to be missed, believe me. Flanders Aurora; and Fran knitting; respectively Peter Paul and Van Ryn; a broad cream-cheesy Cuyp, unquestionable gem; Verschunring's old Hobby Horse, and Paul Potter's original Bull; besides, Thresham himself, also undoubtedly original; white waistcoat, double eye-glass, and all: he was at Drake's last night talking politics to the ladies, and art to Dr. Blunderbole. Do you agree?" Lumney added with a sort of smile. "We can afterwards ride down to the port in the evening to see the *Orion*, she came in yesterday — what! you won't? you are sure that you won't? If so, then," quickly taking Luke's arm, and drawing him close, "tell me decidedly whether you have any chance: how you are getting on with her—yes! how you are getting on with her?"

Luke started, coloured, then withdrew his arm, met Lumney's look, and redder still, said with a laugh,

"A man might go farther and fare worse."

"And how much farther, pray? How many times over the round earth must *she* go before finding a greater coxcomb than yourself. Have you any chance? does she accept service from you? may you follow in her train, kneel in her shadow, eat the dust



she treads upon; stand in her presence like the patient Pleiads in humble supplication; as sorrowful Ariadne stood longing on the beach of Naxos? May you?"

"It is true indeed, I am not worthy to think of her."

"As the reflection in the pool beneath its object to follow every movement?"

"There is no one like her."

"As the fluttering dawn awaits the coming day; as the reed stands in the summer wind bending at every sigh?"

"Have you seen her, Lumney?"

"What, up to your neck, so deep already? and one may yet remember you in the whooping-cough. Alas! for the history of man, the ultimate destiny of his species. Will none learn of experience? must this maudlin disease await our entry into manhood as surely as the affections of infancy usher into youth? Oh, the time thrown away on this empty passion, the force of mind it consumes, the nothing that comes of it, the regrets it entails, the brains it has turned, the bad verses engendered! Come, you are not without sense, and it is not quite too late to save you. Don't rush madly into the fire, and I won't despair of your cooling out of this yet; Slingsby and I will do

our best for you: suppose you dine with us to-morrow."

"I promised the Troyes."

"True; I forgot that you promised: of course you did—humph! we will scarcely find a willow green enough to hang you on."

They were now at the turn of the Mocton Road, and Luke stopped. But Lumney, pointing to the nearest lamp-post, urged him farther, then added in a gentler tone,—

"You love this girl: she is handsome, clever, perhaps amiable and suitable in every way; but at all events, you love her, or are inclined to do so, and that in your position is supreme madness or folly, or even something worse than both, as the world will tell you: and the world will be right according to its light. But I tell you, there is no wisdom to match such folly; that to pursue an honest passion, madly to pursue it, is the best thing you can do: and by all means do so, in spite of maxims, or remonstrance, or of reason even; take your sincere purpose only for guide, conscience and your own brains for sole arm, and act freely then as your courage shall direct: have but the handling of yourself, and the difficulties of life turn to cobwebs. Fortune is a cowardly jade, that ever yields to the hottest spur,

and the strong sinews of a pure will command her easily. Only keep the light bright within ; your arm true at the oar, and the boat must swim alike through shoal and tempest. Such is the advice of one who has tried what life is, and who is more competent to judge on this matter than perhaps you suspect ; who is at all events your true friend, incapable of misdirecting you wilfully. We are at the lamp-post now ; so be off to Mocton," said Lumney, withdrawing his arm and turning rapidly down a street: "I wish you a pleasant evening."

## CHAPTER XI.

## A DISAPPOINTMENT.

LUKE arrived at Mocton, glowing with pleasure and filled with sanguine hope; equally impelled in one direction by two great mental currents, gratitude to his friend, confidence in himself, and both uniting in a new force of will, capable of conceiving the most glorious excesses of liberal devotion and generous action. When in good humour, we feel so very kindly, good resolutions come so easily then, that it is a pity sunshine is not quite permanent; suffering or disappointment appears as often the cause as the consequence of wrong-doing; so that if we only always had our own way, our behaviour would very likely be the better for it.

With his mind clearer by Lumney's encouragement, his intentions more definitely expressed than ever, and with a prospect of meeting Nora before a returning of cold prudence came to damp his re-awakened ardour, Luke was in such a state of exultation, that immediate disappointment of some sort was

almost inevitable ; and on arriving at the cottage it came : a disappointment that was least expected, and which ultimately upset all his calculations of enjoyment for the afternoon. Nora was not at home.

“ Miss Middleton had called, and the two ladies went out with her about an hour since,” was all that the servant could tell him. “ Did he try the summer-house ? ”

He went to see ; for there were voices in the summer-house certainly ; but they proved to be those of Jane and Caroline Middleton only ; and as Caroline was too important a personage just then to be intruded upon, Luke did not need Jane’s signal immediately to withdraw.

Neither at the house nor in the garden ! where then could she have gone ? or why be away at all, knowing that he would have come ? Luke at first sought the garden eager and expectant, but in a while retraced his steps, gloomy and crest-fallen, frowning as he went at the jewelled beds of pansies, enamelled with spangled lights of topaz and turquoise ; too pre-occupied, as it proved, to escape in time from a meeting at the moment highly inconvenient and vexatious ; for though Nora was absent, her father was unfortunately at home, and came out in his dressing-gown and slippers to hail him as he approached the house.

Mr. Troye, it happened, was just at the moment in want of some one to talk to, for there had not been a man about the place for the week, and he had been too busy with his paper on Scythian projectiles to leave the house since his return: Lumney had disappointed him sadly, promising to come out every day; and at this juncture, too, when consulting the *Liber Ignium* of Graccus for reference, it was not fair. Only another instance, however, of the difficulties which men of science and patient research had to encounter on every hand. It was, for instance, sheer folly trying to work in a world, much less in a house infested by women as his was; a man who aspired to benefit his species by the advancement of science, should renounce the idea of augmenting it too: one thing was quite enough for him. He should not marry, he should not at all events have daughters to marry, it was a sad mistake: were he but beginning the world again!

"I wish to find one of those daughters now," said Luke, interrupting; "can you tell me where Nora is?"

"Where most mischief is going, no doubt. I never have any difficulty in finding her: they are always in the way, those women, the whole of them. If I had money I would certainly build my harem at the end of the maze, and put the breadth of the kitchen-

garden between us. However, to talk seriously, do you know, Luke, that in spite of the noise about breech-loaders now, I will be able to prove that they were known from the earliest times; that there were jingals loading at the breech, as well as pateraroes, in Asia."

"Yes; but——"

"Never mind, she'll turn up soon enough. And not only breech-loaders, but rifled tubes were also used, and wrongfully used. I'll maintain it against a battery of artillery, that it is as opposed to the first mathematical principles and to every known law of projection as to common sense, to employ excessive friction on the arrow, bolt, or missile; for friction is not an agent, it can never be used as such: 'tis rather a hindrance, a necessity to be dispensed with; and depend upon it sooner or later they will find that out, and come back to smooth bores and light metal again."

"I think it very likely."


"Not a doubt; but it won't be until they go more wrong first: that is always the way when mechanics and mere practicals meddle with what is properly the domain of science; they must blunder considerably before finding out their own ignorance. Stupidity and prejudice are the real difficulties we have to contend with; and it is only in our own

time those difficulties begin to yield. For the engines of the middle ages, the hacquebutte, culverine, arquebuse, were they anything if at all beyond the barbarous instruments of the rudest times, the balista, catapulta, espringal, trebuchet, mangonel, for instance? By-the-by, as you have nothing else to do, come round to the laboratory, and I'll show you my new idea of a petard on the Chinese principle."

"With much pleasure; but I want to see Nora for a moment."

"Oh! if that's all," taking his arm. "I say, on the Chinese principle, for though the invention is original, still Du Halde refers to something decidedly similar. If I were but to enumerate the errors in this single department of science!" he added, leading Luke round the corner of the house to the back premises. "No absurdity seems to have been escaped. Gustavus Adolphus fought a battle near Leipzig with cannons of neats' leather, and won it too; what do you say to that,—cannons of boiled leather?"

It was needless to attempt further resistance. Mr. Troye was too engrossed by his pursuits to doubt that they interested every one equally; and Luke was too anxious to stand well with Nora's father to exhibit other than pleasure at the experiments of the most peaceable man of the kingdom, who passed his





life devising engines for the better destruction of his species.

Considerably more than an hour elapsed, therefore, before Luke could get back to the garden; and even then the delay brought no amendment to his disappointment, for there was no account of Nora. The gardener had seen her in the morning, but had not seen her go out; and if she had gone out, how decide in which direction?

Only such a little thing kept a great happiness away, that Luke absolutely became quite miserable in consequence. It is so hard to miss a thing when you almost have it—not to be quite as well off as clearly one might easily be. In the midst of his perplexity, however, Caroline and Jane suddenly left the summer-house, and came up the walk, but not towards him; and there was a flushed expression in Caroline's face that prevented him from going to seek information: it would have been indelicate to join them, as evidently they kept on the lower path and out of the way on purpose. But no sooner had they passed the stile on the way towards Hamley Wood, than he understood at once that Nora must be at Middleton Lodge, and that Jane was going up there to bring her down: it must be so, otherwise she would not leave the house at so advanced an hour.

Vexed at his own dulness in not before guessing a thing so probable, Luke waited in the garden as patiently as he could to give Jane a good start, and then followed slowly after, intending to join her on the return.

But at the first wind of the wood he came face to face with Jane returning alone: alone! It was but another item in the sum of the day's disappointment.

Jane immediately explained,—

“Nora had gone to Mocton with some things for Mrs. Middleton's school, intending you to follow and bring her home: she was to wait until you did. And I was to have given you the message,” added Jane; “but when Caroline called it quite went out of my head; so you must blame me: it was my fault.”

“To Mocton! I should never have thought of seeking her there on Saturday,” answered Luke; “I hope she has not waited the whole afternoon on my account. But have you made arrangements for to-morrow? and where shall we go? Nora has never been to Winderpool; what would you think of it? we might leave in the phaeton immediately after morning church; it might be possible to get there and return before dark.”

“Not at all. Winderpool would take an entire day at least; besides, I made an appointment with

Caroline to-morrow ; she is to come home with us after church : however, we shall go before the season is over, perhaps in the autumn ; there is so much wood that the autumn would be the best time."

"Then what about to-morrow ? we have done all the places in the neighbourhood."

"Try elsewhere, if you please ; you may return to town if you are tired of us," said Jane, smiling, and passing through the stile. "There is Nora down by the gate ; she will be late for dinner as usual ; go down and bring her up."

Nora was looking away, busy with the gardener, as Luke came down the walk ; her hair had slipped loose in glossy twists upon her neck and shoulders, and by its intense contrast gave delicacy and relief to her half-seen profile : she turned at once as he appeared, saying—

"The next time I wait half the day for you, I shan't lose my temper for the disappointment ; and if it were not a matter of perfect indifference, I would forbid you on the spot ever to speak to me again."

"Really it was not my fault."

"I am more vexed with myself for being out of humour than with you for making me so, it is paying you such a compliment," she added ; "but I am annoyed, and everything has gone wrong with me in

consequence. For instance, I lost a pair of gloves to Mr. Pennet on Caroline's proposal, besides breaking my new parasol, and spoiling my dress with the watering-pot, all because you did not come in time; and besides there is to be a dance at Mrs. Drake's on Wednesday, to which I am sure we shan't be invited: but you don't care; you don't care whether we are or not, just because it would give me pleasure."

"You said you did not enjoy balls."

"I might have said so when tired after the race ball; but if I did, I change my mind. Mrs. Drake's, too, is far the pleasantest house in town; the last time I met her she kept me laughing the whole time: it is what you never do: you are getting almost as bad as Jane: as serious and dull. Only think, she knew all about Caroline this long time, and never told me a word! Is it true? did you believe it at first? What could Mr. Bradel fancy in a girl like Caroline Middleton?"

"She is far too good for him; it reflects on the whole sex that a man like him should have such power of choice: you should be ashamed of it."

"Should I? How do you know?"

"You would not yourself marry a prince of the blood merely for his rank," said Luke.

"I would like him to ask me, though; just for the name of it, Luke. Why didn't you go down to Mocton for me?"

"I was here all the afternoon, and miserably lonely," he answered, then explaining the mistake.

In reply Nora slowly took his arm and looked up, her fine eyes growing softly liquid with tender light and truth. There is a sublime falsehood of the eyes, which at first looks as true as the deep azure of heaven itself: have you ever seen it, reader? seen fine eyes with nothing in them, or known those bright birds of Paradise, angels of seeming light, descend sometimes to clever trickery and cheat?

"You were miserable, I suppose," she said; "but what kind of day did I pass at Mocton, all alone, and expecting you every moment? No matter, though, it will be fine to-morrow, and we'll make amends; Jane and I have made discoveries beyond Hamley that you shall visit."

"Miss Middleton will also come?" suggested Luke.

"Yes, she haunts Jane now; but you must not pretend to be aware of anything, for though he has proposed, still there is nothing settled, and no one can yet tell how his father may take it. I would not, for my part, have a proposal at all on such terms, if

one might not talk of it. But they are calling from the window ; you have made me late for dinner again : I shall get scolded, as usual, on your account." And they both hurried up to the house.

## CHAPTER XII.

## SET FAIR.

POSSESSED of considerable property in his own right, and the landed estates being strictly entailed, Edwin Bradel had but comparative results to dread from even the utmost displeasure of his father; but that his anger would be thoroughly provoked he did not doubt—a connection with a family of mere second-rate rank like the Middletons would to the ambitious old man appear an unpardonable *mésalliance*, to which neither influence nor time would ever reconcile him. Edwin, therefore, regarded a rupture as inevitable; but, as it proved, he was altogether mistaken. The announcement was received by his father with astonishing cordiality and kindness of manner.

“I had in truth other hopes for you,” he said; “but it is too late to discuss them at present. As you have thought fit to decide for yourself on the matter, you are undoubtedly the best judge; and a man of your position must marry before he can do

any good; you are the more likely to settle seriously to your career afterwards."

"I had been prepared for a scene," Edwin said, giving details of the interview afterwards to Caroline; "when, if not exactly the thing to please him most, it seemed I had done what he was inclined at least to suffer with excellent grace; he spoke of you also with sincere appreciation, and trusted you would not prove disinclined to reside at Everley: he would do everything to make the house agreeable and facilitate such an arrangement. I should have my own establishment in the west wing, and be in every way independent; for such, you know, is the custom in our family: the eldest son takes possession of the west wing on his marriage."

"I am so very grateful; I hope he won't be disappointed in me," said Caroline with joyful surprise.

"Certainly no fear of that."

"I shall not, however, be afraid to meet him now. How wonderfully kind of him!"

"And no wonder. It is but natural that every one should like you; even your very presence makes me feel better—better for being near you."

"And happier, I hope?"

"If to judge by what hitherto composed my happiness, not at all; as my old pursuits have at once



become insupportably frivolous and tiresome; and as you don't like sailing, I shall have the yacht unrigged, shall sell my hunters: nothing for me now that you don't share; my only pleasure shall be your enjoyment."

"For my part, I can't understand greater happiness than at present, Edwin, to find the first great difficulty of all fall down flat before us. It makes me nervous that everything should settle smoothly; it would be a better omen if some trifling obstacles yet remained: a few pebbles on the way, something to annoy a little."

"Well, I am not so superstitious; but what about residence at Everley?"

"I have no other wish than to please every one. How truly kind of him! What are his tastes, Edwin? Is he fond of lively people? I am dull, especially dull when anxious to succeed with others; it is a chance, however, that as he is an invalid, he will perhaps on that account prefer quiet. I shan't despair, nevertheless, although I should fail at first; it is possible even so, that we may get on very well by-and-by."

"We shall get on very well, now, by-and-by, and always."

"My joy, Edwin, fills and overflows around me.

I look through a saffron glass and see nothing but gold everywhere, so when your mind changes you must give me distinct notice of it, or I shan't guess it."

Caroline was much improved by happiness; the air of mutinous pretension, an appendage hitherto of her position as a recognized personage, had, now that her feelings were touched, quite faded into them; her expression accordingly grew more subdued, and the face sometimes wore a gentle kind of melancholy not unbecoming, and not at all akin to sadness: her joy was not less real that it ran in an under-current, not less deep for its pure noiseless flow. And her happiness, it will be supposed, was shared to exaggeration by her mother. Mrs. Middleton was now at the pinnacle of actual gladness and noisy jubilation; everything had come about so rapidly and so well: such a sudden tide of prosperity had set in, that this last fact of Mr. Bradel's consent and approval well-nigh turned her brain; so it was full noon at Middleton Lodge: the rusts which had been gathering through many corroding years of bickering and disappointment at once rubbed away; and, in the genial glow of household happiness, dispositions became tolerant and even submissive once

more; a lost buoyancy of spirits was mysteriously re-captured, and Mrs. Middleton had further intensely voluptuous delight in the feigned and envious congratulations of her numerous acquaintance.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## EVERLEY HALL.

THE Rev. Mr. Pennet, whom we have mentioned before, was not slightly hurt at the present conjuncture of affairs. Intimate as he was with both houses, Edwin's friend, almost a weekly guest at Everley, and honoured with the entire confidence of the family, it did not seem quite fair that he should be denied special communication concerning so momentous a fact as his friend's engagement: that the news should come to him through the ordinary channels of mere general report; when questioned by strangers concerning it, he accordingly felt ashamed at having no private information either to offer or retain. If Mrs. Middleton were in difficulty or harassed by doubt, that would not be the case: he would be then consulted readily and confidentially; or if Edwin wanted him to appease his father, or undertake some equally unpleasant office, he would certainly have been trusted; but now things went

well with all parties, universal prosperity and happiness rendered people independent of his services, and he was not wanted. It is not an unusual fate of confidants; and with his experience of life, Mr. Pennet ought to have been wiser than to notice it: as he was indeed wiser than to exhibit symptoms of pique. It was in order precisely not to give suspicion of perceiving the slight, that he one day made a point of going especially to Everley Hall to offer his share of congratulations also; and it happened then that in the avenue he met the Troyes going to make a morning visit with the same intention. Mrs. Troye was full of the great topic.

“Though all over the town, until Saturday they had not heard a word of it; Jane might have learned it secretly from Caroline indeed, but she (Mrs. Troye), until Saturday did not dream of it: and it was by the merest chance even then, for Miss Fletcher sent in the morning to say she had business in town, and would give me a seat; and as I would have to go on Tuesday, and that one day was as good as another,” continued Mrs. Troye, “it was better not to miss the offer, so it was agreed. I had to call at Tuille’s also about Nora’s dress, as it was provoking to have her disappointed again; and Jane was giving me some ribbon to match, just fingering

out the length, when the carriage drove up before I was half ready; so I had to rush away, and then Miss Fletcher told me everything."

Mr. Pennet, protesting that he was not sorry to find other friends in his own predicament, advanced to shake hands with Nora, who was some paces forward.

"Is this your first visit to Everley?" he asked, smiling.

"Since my return, yes; though I was often here long ago, before I went to school, and remember the place perfectly," she answered. "The avenue has been altered since; they have added another bend, and improved it decidedly. Where is the short way? oh! here, by the laburnum, I remember now," turning round. "Shall we go up by the short way, mamma?"

Mr. Pennet led the way into the footpath, under the laburnum.

"You were not sorry to return, I suppose? I can fancy you sick enough of school."

"Well, it is a change to be lifted from one's pinafore into a ball dress, certainly; the idea of turning into a young lady was not itself unpleasant, although I was very well off at school, and very contented: they let me have entirely my own way, and then I

don't complain. There is the front; now isn't it a noble place? such breadth and repose, such splendour of proportion; and how beautifully kept! Look at the painted grass-plot, with bunches of glowing scarlet and orange, cast down upon it; how intensely vivid! Doesn't the view of a place like this fill up the spirit and ennoble one? on me it has always that effect, awakens all sorts of undefined and ambitious longings: and the row of marble urns along the basement; see, in and out the whole line of building, what a finished and courtly effect they give!"

While still admiring the details of the place, Mrs. Bradel came out to meet them, for Mrs. Troye was an old friend; so with greeting and smiles of familiar welcome they all went into the house together. On entering the drawing-room, however, old Mr. Bradel was seen on his cushions by the fireplace; and it was not a very joyful surprise, for Mr. Bradel was understood to have ways that no one should intrude upon: there was a vague kind of mystery about him, that every one acknowledged; so Jane, who was first of the party, hesitated to enter, until promptly looking up from his pamphlet, he called out,

"Ladies, come in, ladies; delighted to see you; is that Mr. Pennet? I am very glad; just the very

one I wanted. What do you think they say here about the poor-law?—a monstrous statement ;” and motioning Mr. Pennet to a sofa by the chimney-piece, with a nod to the group of ladies and a curt answer to Mrs. Troye, who came forward to inquire about his foot, he turned his back to discuss the pamphlet.

“He won’t mind us,” whispered Mrs. Bradel; “he is better to-day, and it will amuse him to have people in the room. I suppose you will be glad to get away from the fire,” leading the way to the upper end, where the daylight entered ; for except there all the blinds were down, and though broad noon the fire-light was quite ruddy on the faces of the gentlemen by the hearth.

The room was quite spacious enough to allow various groups to converse together without inconvenience ; so after Mrs. Bradel had done wondering at the change in Nora’s appearance, and her size, complexion, figure, hair, &c., Mrs. Troye began in her way to probe for news of the great event.

“It could be no secret now ; it was all about the town ; and as a neighbour, an old friend, she had, she thought, as good a right to be told as anybody.”

But, at the first word, Mrs. Bradel put a finger to her lips, and pointed nervously to her husband.



"He hates to have it spoken of," she said. "I don't know why exactly; but allusion to it makes him very angry: by-and-by, outside, I will tell you all I know."

So the conversation had necessarily to flow on more ordinary topics, and Mrs. Troye to control herself. They were soon at the latest about the Sunday and industrial schools at Mocton; how the new mistress behaved, what Lady Delcomer had done, and how differently things were managed at Delamere village: a multitude of details to which Nora was quite a stranger, and indifferent; so finding herself by degrees altogether out of the conversation, she went into the wide embrasure of the window, and sat there alone behind the curtain.

Awhile the voices mingled pleasantly; it was curious to hear them weave and tangle into each other. The broken discussion of the poor-laws going on in the distance, interrupted by a quiet assent from Mr. Pennet now and then, or by the eager jealousies and interests of village patronage which occupied the ladies.

But from thence Nora gradually, and half unconsciously, passed to a scrutiny of the objects near her in the embrasure. Mr. Bradel had a marked propensity for art, and was a considerable collector. There were

stands and brackets, a profusion of ornaments, and many objects of interest and taste, strewn about; the splendour of the luxurious and perfect appointments also by degrees overpowered the imagination, and induced a lethargic state of dreamy admiration: for all was magnificence, tempered by fastidious elegance, from groined ceiling and gilded panelling, to the carpet soft as eider down, with its deep velvet hues, and shades of flickering colour—sombre, yet clear as painted glass—melting into each other. On a massy pedestal the sinewy limbs of a bronze Gladiator struggled, and beneath the silken window-hangings opposite a too voluptuous Aphrodité unveiled her alabaster beauty in a warm atmosphere of rich reflected tints and broken roseate shadows.

Within, it was the shrine of luxury and repose, and without, the view was in accord. The terrace, bright with its varied groups of flowers, the marble fountain plashing solemnly in the calm noon, and beyond the massive carving of the porch, the handsome west wing crossed at an angle, with its tall mullioned windows and fair Doric outline. A grandeur of subdued rest and a harmony pervaded all; occasionally a servant passed by gravely: even the white spaniel yawning on the terrace had a peculiar silken look, a certain air of the place upon him.

Fully under the indistinct but penetrating influence of all this, Nora fast lost herself in vague reflections: perhaps she was thinking of the narrow poverty of the imperfect establishment at home; feeling the serenity of mind which flows from the perfection of mere material things; if not exactly envying Caroline, thinking much of her perhaps, and of the great happiness which her good fortune promised; when at once she was roused by becoming dimly conscious of the conversation between the ladies at the other side of the curtain. No doubt of it; Mrs. Bradel, in a sort of conversational whisper, was directly talking of herself.

“Well, I think her beautiful, nothing less: a most interesting face; such mind, so much in it. How proud you must be of her, Mrs. Troye; what a comfort for you. If I only had such a daughter——”

Nora’s ear strained farther, but only a word now and then came from her mother in a lower tone.

“I am so glad you like her: Jane said you would. So kind of you, Mrs. Bradel, though I should not say it perhaps; she certainly is much improved, and looks well by night; really very well; dresses with such taste:—clever indeed; I wish you saw her by night, I would very much——”

“She went to an evening party last Wednesday,

and looked to me nothing short of beautiful, though perhaps I am not an honest judge; you know she is my only sister."

"I can well believe it; and if you would bring her here some day and stay the evening, it would amuse us old people very much. You would not mind, Mrs. Troye, lending her for a day or two? she is one to know more of, I am sure; and to her it would also be a variety, as we have many things about the house interesting to a girl fresh from school. Mrs. Middleton and Caroline are coming on Tuesday; what if the girls joined them? Mr. Bradel would like it, I am sure, now that he is better; it amuses him to see new faces."

And with a sense of vague pleasure, Nora heard Mrs. Bradel continue to urge, until Jane finally left her seat and came over to her window, saying,—

"Mrs. Bradel kindly asks us to dine on Tuesday, Nora! What do you say to it?"

As Nora had nothing to oppose, it was settled, and presently they all rose.

"You have made a conquest of me," Mrs. Bradel said to Nora, as together they went down the room towards the gentlemen, "and I have just declared my passion to your mother."

"It would be wiser, then, not to come on Tuesday

perhaps, lest on better knowledge you find me out and change your mind," was the smiling answer. "But what beautiful engravings, so clear, such strength and delicacy; I suppose these are all proofs, Mrs. Bradel: I never saw anything like them before?" added Nora, bending into the large cedar-wood portfolio, at Mr. Bradel's elbow.

"I don't think you have seen much finer," said Mr. Bradel, catching the observations, and at once transferring his attention from Mr. Pennet on the sofa. "Many of these are rare artists' proofs procured with considerable trouble. Are you an admirer of engravings, Miss — you must excuse me," and he looked doubtingly at his wife.

"Troye! that is Miss Troye, sir!" said Mr. Pennet, "Miss Nora Troye."

"Oh, to be sure, I have no memory for names; you have not been much here before, I think. Miss Troye, sister to Miss Jane, I presume?" offering his hand and adding, "good engravings are a hobby of mine, I'm glad you like them. In engravings there is no middle place; good even will not do, they must be excellent: a used, woolly impression is the last of horrors, infinitely worse to my mind than a bad picture; I could not sit in the room with one."

"My praise is of no value, I am so ignorant;

only I am sure those are very, very, beautiful," said Nora, with a glow, of real admiration, under the consciousness of having pleased and attracted Mr. Bradel.

"Indeed you have taste, I'm sure, my dear. Though I don't know anything about these things," said her mother, "Mr. Farren said so, when your father showed him your sketches; he said they showed wonderful taste: you remember, Jane, he did."

"A taste in art, a mere taste, is I believe only one of Miss Nora Troye's perfections," interrupted Mr. Pennet with a smile. "I have heard of other things—shall I say of actual performances even—in a higher art absolutely than art itself."

"Cookery, maybe," replied Nora.

"Of that, my dear, I'll answer for it, you are shamefully ignorant, as Jane knows," said her mother.

"Nor do I mean coquetry either," said Mr. Pennet.

Nora laughed. "Have you been telling?" she asked, looking close at her sister: "please hold your tongue, Mr. Pennet, until I find out from Jane whether, and in what form, she has been treacherous. If there is a spy in the camp 'tis as well to know it; and though you cannot in fact have anything to tell,

yet it is better to be cautious, for you might invent, and people might believe you."

"If you really care for engravings, there is a set of rare Barry's in my study, that I should like you to see," said Mr. Bradel, addressing her again. "I was two years on the look-out for them: Sutton, of Nassau Street, had a commission to procure them at any price; and, by mere chance, Sir Henry Prince, of the Royal Academy, heard of a gentleman who had part of a set. As he wanted money, I fortunately got them; the remainder came up afterwards one by one. I should like you to see them."

"Miss Troye promised to dine with us on Tuesday," said Mrs. Bradel; "she can see everything then."

"Very good—on Tuesday: I am very glad."

"You will come, of course, Mr. Pennet," continued Mrs. Bradel; "there is Caroline, Mrs. Middleton—Mr. Middleton will not come, he is not well. Edwin will bring one or two gentlemen more."

"Oh, the Middletons are coming. Tuesday: I forgot it was Tuesday," said Mr. Bradel, sinking back in his chair, and presently pushing round towards the fire. Except to complain of his foot, he did not open his lips again—a significant circum-

stance and which forthwith caused the conversation rapidly to decline. It was a relief when presently Jane spoke of flowers, and an adjournment to the garden was proposed, to every one's satisfaction. After they had gone, Mr. Bradel sat awhile in silence, looking at the fire over his folded hands; then Mr. Pennet took up his hat, but he was simultaneously motioned to lay it down gain.

"You have just heard," Mr. Bradel said, then waking up and addressing him directly, "you have heard that the Middletons dine here on Tuesday; there is no use in a mystery about it now, nor will I conceal the truth from you: you know, of course, why they dine here?"

Mr. Pennet had heard the report; it was everywhere.

"You know, also, that I consented—that I gave my son leave to make a fool of himself," he added.

Mr. Pennet was also aware of Mr. Bradel's consent to the marriage.

"But do you know why that was?—why I consented that my son should scatter his fortunes—do almost the only thing I desired he should not do?—agreed to sacrifice the fruit of two useful and thrifty lives, have the progress of our blood checked and name obscured? Because I could not help it, then," said



Mr. Bradel, bitterly ; “because he expected opposition and had shaped his course accordingly. He was quite ready to do without my permission if I withheld it.”

Mr. Pennet opened his eyes : he was not prepared for so startling an announcement, and added, doubtfully, “that Miss Middleton was said to be an amiable and accomplished person.”

“Accomplished, certainly ; not a doubt of it ; they appear to have managed it well—very well : going on this long time, and not a word of it came to my ears. I thought he had passed by that sort of folly long ago, and looked on his marriage with Lady Maria as settled : the marquis and I have understood each other for some time.”

Mr. Pennet confessed that he had heard of the rumour, but supposed it a freak that would die of itself, and end in nothing, as usual ; it was a surprise to him to see the direction things were taking. “No doubt, sir, an alliance with the Delcomer family were more suitable to your son’s position, and would accord better with his future interests.”

As Mr. Bradel did not reply immediately, the curate had a moment’s leisure to turn the matter in his mind, and that moment was amply sufficient to convince him that a marriage with Lady Maria would

not only be the most suitable for Edwin himself, but also decidedly the most advantageous for some of Edwin's friends. Mr. Pennet was at once clear upon the point. If the marquis became Edwin's father-in-law, not only would it insure his return for the county, but moreover there were some stout livings in the Delcomer family, in the future presentation to which Edwin might probably have a voice. Besides, and also quite independently of the advantages of that prospect, Mr. Pennet had before convinced himself that a connection with the Middletons would be the most unfit thing possible for his friend; if for no other reason than because Mrs. Middleton had a nephew named Wade preparing for the church, who might—should Mr. Wilson inconsiderately live too long—come to throw an eye on Mocton preferment himself, the reversion of which Mr. Pennet had grown for some while to consider almost his own legitimate property. Without doubt, then, it was absurd of Edwin to sacrifice a fine position to this passing whim; the disappointment of his father was in every way reasonable: and after expressing himself to that effect, he added,—

“That it might have been easy to end the matter if taken in time, and that he regretted Mr. Bradel had not openly explained his views before.”

"Regret ! there is enough in the business certainly to regret," was the peevish answer.

Mr. Pennet slowly walked a few paces through the room, then sat again, and taking a penknife from the table, closely examined the blades one after the other.

"Is it too late yet, sir ?"

Mr. Bradel looked up.

"You hear that they are to come here almost as members of my family already. I must receive her as a daughter ; the news is blown over the shire. I don't know that the wedding-day is fixed, that the lawyers are set to work, that your new cassock is not put in hand, though it might without my knowledge for that matter ; but, otherwise, there seems no arrangement incomplete : very likely it is you will marry them."

"I have known Edwin cool of as hot fancies before now ; in fact, he was as much in love with Lucy Swanton, and he did not marry her." Mr. Pennet shut up the blades of the penknife, and ran his fingers through the fine Jove-like curls that tumbled about his face. "I don't think it confirms anything to have the lady in the house : on the contrary ; nor do I think that the public announcement gives consistency or greater likelihood to the fact ;

or that your son, when he reflects, will be likely to persist in what some time or other must appear to him a senseless project. Therefore was it in my opinion most wise not to prevent, not to attempt opposition, which might have provoked rashness, retaliation, and imprudent action, for which there is at present no need, and of which there is, I presume, no danger. The important point of delay may be gained by moderation: it may now be possible to defer the accomplishment of this design for some reasonable term; and if that should be, why then?—ruptures, even in an affair of this nature, have occurred ere now: more unlikely things have happened than that your son should tire of his fancy, and change his mind. There are, besides, matters connected with it which, to my knowledge, he will not ultimately approve; for instance, Middleton was formerly involved in mining speculations, and never thoroughly recovered from them: his daughter, I suspect, won't have much fortune, perhaps not any."

"If so, could they hope to gain my consent?"

"Edwin is independent; they might have thought to do without it."

"The more impudent of them; but even that he'll scarcely mind."

"I don't know; although reckless enough some-

times, he pretty well understands the value of money. Then his father-in-law he won't like when he knows him better, nor the mother-in-law either."

"He'll count on shaking them off."

"Or else he may change his mind after all, and discover that he is too young to marry: fond of liberty and pleasure, he may perceive that there is an amount of slavery in marriage at the best. How if he were induced to put it off, perhaps for a year or so?"

"The Middletons wouldn't let him."

"If they attempt coercion, he will certainly move in a contrary direction. Or lastly," Mr. Pennet added, "it is not impossible, even in the narrowest compass of time, it is not quite impossible he may yet meet some one he would like better."

There was sudden noise and laughter in the hall; the ladies had come in from the garden, and Mr. Pennet just got back into his seat as the door burst open and Nora appeared, with a start. "She begged pardon, but she had lost her glove; it had dropped in the room, perhaps: she was always losing her gloves. Mr. Pennet need not trouble himself, she would find it directly. They were all so enchanted with the garden, that she never minded until the moment of going away; and the gardener had been so kind to Jane, given her such a mass of cuttings.

There, in the portfolio! she knew she should find it." Her clear cheek wore a full light of pleasure, and a strong reflection from her red ribbons deepened on it as she stooped near Mr. Bradel for the glove. He looked closely at her, and held out his hand, as she assured him again of "the pleasure the visit had given, and hoped he would soon be well; she reminded him of his promise about the Barrys: of all things he wasn't to forget that; she should think of nothing else," and was off.

When the hall door closed, Mr. Pennet, then taking up again the thread of his observation, repeated,—

"He may yet see some one he would like better."

## CHAPTER XIV.

## FORESHADOWINGS.

THE Tuesday on which Nora was first invited to Everley was the date of considerable intimacy and friendship between her family and the Bradels. As neighbours and friends of Caroline, the Troyes were henceforth frequently asked to share in the visitings and familiar intercourse that arose naturally from the projected marriage; and this acquaintance began already to influence Nora in many ways, giving a new direction and rapid development to her character: and with which other causes also at this time materially co-operated. For instance, her mother, not a very sensible person, or remarkable for discretion, saw in the notice of the Bradels a source of social advancement for her daughters—or rather daughter, as Jane was scarcely included—and began early to tell her friends “how much Nora was thought of at Everley; how fond Mrs. Bradel was of her; how much Mr. Bradel admired her singing, and how it pleased him to

have her in the house ; ” talk which might not have done harm if she had not at the same time commenced to treat Nora at home in accordance with the increased notion of her importance : to surround her in the family circle with something of the adulation she met with in society, and which was then offered to Nora in a degree capable of misleading a cooler brain than hers. She had a facility for making herself liked, without directly appearing to seek the good opinion of the world ; for in public her manners were quiet and rather retiring ; it was only in the intimacy of a conversation that the distinct power of her mind was discerned, and such intimacy had to be sought with a diligence that added to its value : even the jealousy of her own sex, that most sincere tribute, was not wanting to complete in leading her vanity astray. When to the dangers of such a position was added the deficiency of counteracting influence at home, it will not be wondered at that Nora began early to acquire exaggerated notions about herself, and by degrees to depreciate the ordinary circumstances and conditions of her position. Thence it gradually followed that her manners became slightly pretentious and arrogant even sometimes to Jane, and were often positively disrespectful to her mother ; indulgences imperceptibly became rights and necessities that she



could not dispense with, until at last the regularity of the household, and the comfort of it, were freely sacrificed to her convenience. On the morning before a ball, the parlour was impassable with litter ; on the morning after it, Nora breakfasted in bed. From late hours came headaches and nervous attacks, which commanded every one's attention and sympathy ; if she were ill, or fancied herself so, it was enough to convulse the household : a noise, an excess of light in the room, the clumsiness of a servant, made her irritable then ; and the occupation of her day at last became limited to sitting well dressed in the drawing-room, where Mrs. Troye would keep talking incessantly about her, her dress, her looks, the things that were said of her, the wreaths and colours which became her.

In spite of the blindest affection, Jane was soon clear-sighted enough to foresee the evil effects of such training ; but she did not equally perceive that Nora underwent, even from herself, a course of spoiling far more dangerous than the indiscreet and frivolous idolatry of her mother. For Jane's own pride in her sister took a higher ground, and was expressed in much more flattering forms ; she was constantly urging her to practise her voice, to read, to cultivate the many capacities of her mind, and develope her taste.

Of her aptitude for poetry she was most vain, and had always at hand some original attempt in that way to exhibit secretly to acquaintances, and challenge their admiration: it was Jane who first induced her to try the composition of her own songs.

If such a state of things did not react on her character, and in some degree bring out its defects, it would have been miraculous; Nora's nature was of too delicate and sensitive a texture not to be highly influenced by surrounding circumstances, and from the commencement, warning symptoms began to exhibit themselves: symptoms that persons less blinded by interest or attachment must have readily perceived. Not only had she become, as we have said, self-indulgent, and difficult at home, but on occasions her character was marked even in stronger shades; and often when her mother—as happened sometimes under the pressure of a household difficulty—sought to degrade her for the moment into some act of useful service, she encountered a temper and resistance not to be trifled with. Even also in society certain airs were beginning to grow upon her; things more easily understood than defined, a fastidious elegance, an affected refinement of manners, that deeply wounded where it was practised, and exposed her to considerable sarcasm. It was unfortunate for her that she

had quitted school exactly when the season at Ormiston was in its height, and entered the world at precisely the most dangerous period, before having time to acclimatize with its atmosphere. At once she was transferred from the class-room to the ball-room, and immediately chanced to acquire such considerable social reputation, and became so distinctly the fashion, that Mrs. Middleton secretly considered it fortunate Caroline had settled herself in time.

For everything was the same as settled, although the marriage was not fixed to be until the end of autumn. All difficulties were smoothed away, and Mr. Bradel was so unexpectedly satisfied about it that Mrs. Middleton scarcely regretted the long postponement, when agreed to solely in accordance with his wishes and at his request. Indeed, Mr. Bradel's reasons for proposing delay, though first felt to be a disappointment, were so excellent in themselves as scarcely to admit of question. The heir to Everley Hall was a personage in the county; should marry as became his rank, and it would require time to arrange matters properly. During the summer some principal families would be travelling, whose presence at the wedding was of absolute necessity, as there were people to compliment and interests to bind with political views—Edwin being intended to represent


the county. Even the mere marriage ceremony might itself be made much use of for that end: and besides, alterations and improvements were necessary at Everley in connection with it; so, everything considered, it was as well perhaps to adopt Mr. Bradel's expressed views: the marriage was accordingly deferred until the end of autumn—an arrangement that, but for the annoyance it seemed to cause Edwin, Caroline could see nothing to find fault with. She was so sure of Edwin's affection, every one received her so well, even Mr. Bradel himself was so kind to her, the time passed so pleasantly, and she was so very happy, that there was no space in her mind for dissatisfaction of any sort. Hers was a genial nature, that put forth its tender buds and blossomed freely in warmth and sunshine; prosperity suited her best, and she improved under its influence. Her character became more simple and loving from the fact that everything around her was calm, and the promise of the future so fair, without even a crumpling rose-leaf, or crystal of summer hoar-frost, to hint at a possible future change of season.

## CHAPTER XV.

## UNDER THE YEWS.

THE season of festivities at Ormiston came gradually to a close as the summer advanced; people thinned off to watering places, to the country, to the Continent, causing a cessation of social life in the town, which had rather the effect of drawing more closely together the three families with whom we have principally to do. Edwin Bradel spent the time constantly organizing excursions and riding parties in the neighbourhood; every week were meetings at Everley or at Middleton Lodge, in which the Troyes usually shared, and when they did not, the party was observed to be deficient in interest; for, at this time, Nora was an established acquisition, and in the almost family intimacy of those occasions her natural brilliancy and wit became a remarkable feature. It was then she first began "to make an exhibition of herself," as she called it, by singing her own songs; which, both for music and rhythm, elicited high commendation from Mr. Pennet, then a literary and musical critic of consi-

derable local eminence. Luke and she were, nevertheless, all through on the best of terms; he saw nothing to be desired, no change in her whatever, and, beyond envy of the greater opportunities others had of approaching her, was content with his position and prospects. Even the admiration of the world was itself rather gratifying to his vanity than a cause of jealous anxiety. When the attentions offered brought no sense of insecurity, they became merely an acknowledgment of her merit, an indirect tribute to his own excellent taste—and even Edwin Bradel himself he began to consider in a more amiable light on account of the politeness of his family to Nora. Jane, however, was becoming daily more uneasy: the evidences of change in the character and temper of her sister were obviously increasing; and she regretted it much, but it was not quite from the highest motives that she regretted it most. Pride in Nora being her weakness, she had in as much account the interests of her reputation before the world as the more moral view of the injury thereby to her personal character; and if at home, bearing fits of inexcusable caprice without complaint, still, the moment it was likely these defects might exhibit themselves to strangers, her energies awoke, and she was quick to take alarm.



This was strikingly felt on the day of the visit to the lake of Winderpool.


The excursion to Winderpool had been long anticipated as a pleasure; but on the morning before setting out, a misunderstanding had arisen between the sisters; the matter of which, though in itself trifling, was nevertheless sufficient to ruffle Nora's temper for the remainder of the day, and during the drive to the lake she would not condescend to look at her sister, would not hear the most direct remark from her; though, to the others, she was pointedly and it seemed purposely courteous.

Jane was accordingly the whole time in agony lest Mr. Pennet or Captain Seaton should observe anything; and they must have been blind indeed if they did not, for Nora had never annoyed her more than on this occasion: the marked coldness to herself she would not have noticed but for the presence of others; but, besides that, the tone of her manners all through the day was positively hateful — her talkativeness, her flippancy, the eager effort to absorb the principal interest and attention; and with much alarm Jane once surprised a strange meditative expression in the fixed, grey glance of Mr. Pennet.

This continued even when they were on the water, and at length Jane grew to hate the sound of

Nora's voice so much that, turning away altogether, she sought forgetfulness and relief in the beauty of the landscape: but it was not easy to forget. As the boat glided lazily in by the base of the red granite cliffs on one side bounding the lake, she could think of nothing but her sister. Now the features of the broken shore passed her by in moving panorama; rugged scalps and broken headlands, the blue water aglow with glancing mirrored tints from alternate tufts of broom and showers of golden furze; great slabs of pink and brown reflections dipping from the mighty rocks, myriad berries and wild-flowers lighting the unbroken surface of the silent eddies; sometimes a festoon of hanging creeper came skimming by, or a wreath of wild convolvulus breathing on the current, crisp as a collaret of foam, its white bells floating double like "swan and shadow."

Disappointment was still to be her portion then, Jane thought, as her eyes filled with tears unconsciously—the same bitter fate to attend the decline of her lonely life, the last hope to end like all the rest. The sister to whom she had looked forward for companionship and consolation was to make but another link in the system of consistent failure which had hitherto been her destiny. Jane's nature had been, however, far too long exercised to allow





indulgence in mere helpless despondency, and presently, when they landed on the island, she had come to a fixed resolution, and decided henceforth to pursue an entire alteration of conduct with regard to Nora; determined that neither indiscretion nor flattery, nor even affection, should further obscure a nature that of itself she esteemed so high and gifted.

There were many things to be seen on the island: fresh views of the water, a Druid's stone, some curious old timber, and Jane had leisure to think over the matter without interruption, as the party passed from one point to another through the narrow lanes of brushwood. In the midst of her plans, however, she was at once attracted and considerably amused by in part overhearing a conversation between Edwin and Caroline a little behind her; his own fortunate position, combined with the time and circumstances, seemed at the moment to inspire him with a sort of poetry, and he was just becoming whimsically eloquent, when Nora's voice at a high pitch came to interrupt and annoy Jane again.

"Did you see the gipsy at the landing-place, Mr. Bradel? Why not have your fortune told? seeing Caroline, however, that would not be difficult; she ought rather seek to learn hers: supposing, at the same time, it is wise to know it, which is doubtful;

for I believe we had much better not know what is in store for us. If there were only Protestant convents, Caroline, where we might go and live at peace ! I remember visiting a convent at Ripton once, and they seemed the happiest creatures I ever met."

"There are other ways of being happy besides in convents," answered Bradel, who then continued in a low voice to address Caroline on his arm. "Here we shall have a cottage if you like, perhaps on yonder beach, sheltered by that holly grove ; fancy the long summer days passed there, solitary as the coot and waterfowl, listening to the sighing water breeze and lapping wavelets at our feet. How the long hours will then dissolve in loving more and more !"

"But what a charming spot for a dance, of all places in the world !" broke in Nora, again. "Look, Caroline, Mr. Bradel must give us a dance here some night: 'tis really a sylvan ball-room ; the turf is already spread. Fancy music and torchlight under those funereal yews." Caroline, looking up dreamily, saw they had reached a sort of plateau on the summit of the path, a smooth inclosure shorn out from the thicket around and held in deep shadow by the joining branches of two patriarchal yews some dozen yards apart.

"This is called Lacy's slope," said Bradel ; "a

legend is connected with the place, which has a bad reputation after nightfall. It is said that Hervé de Lacy, one of the former lords of this country, got tired of his wife and brought her down here one night in her coffin; I remember when a boy seeing the remains of a stone cross supposed to mark the spot. The peasants tell of white ladies, of shrieks and noises of all sorts to be heard and seen at night; so, Miss Troye, it would not do for your sylvan ball: would you like a damp sprawling ghost to come asking you to waltz?"

"By all means—a delightful ghost—I never saw one yet; you must bring us down here some night on purpose, Mr. Bradel."

"Very well, and we'll ask Seaton to give a hand at the oar, for no boatmen in the country would land on the island after dark," said Bradel, sitting on the root of one of the trees. "You would not be afraid to row Miss Troye here by moonlight, would you, Seaton? We can bring Mr. Pennet, too, for protection; the man of peace to engage the fiend in case the courage of our man of war should fail. Pennet would be a very devil at a mere lady devil; no lady living or dead could resist our fascinating pastor."

"An irresistible gentleman," said Nora, with a

movement of her shoulders, "the most worthless thing on earth. I don't think Mr. Pennet has any claim to be so depreciated."

"Certainly experience gives me none such, for I have ever been an outcast from the favour of your sex," replied Mr. Pennet.

"Perhaps because you never sought it, and I would not think any worse of you for that," she replied. "The meanest sight in the world is to my mind a great grown man frittering his time away in maudlin sentiment or vapid politeness, like the many ladylike gentlemen we meet with; I could not help despising such a one."

"You would not have a man fall in love then? you would consider it a weakness beneath his dignity," put in Bradel: "what do you say to that, Caroline?"

"Oh! if you appeal to Caroline, I am silent; of course she knows best," answered Nora. "I would recommend her, however, to keep her own mind, whatever it be: as nothing is to be gained by answering a question of that nature directly, and declaring one's entire opinion on so delicate a subject, there is an advantage in keeping something back: a little mystery is always useful, even though about nothing."

"And mere love is such a nothing," said Mr. Pennet.

"Some of us hold there is nothing like it," answered Bradel.

"But not for any time: few are of that opinion very long," replied Mr. Pennet; "as it is arrived at without logical process, it is generally got rid of also without much trouble; caprice generally disposes of the question."

"No wonder you complain of ill-treatment at our hands if such is your opinion," added Nora, laughing; "however, Mr. Bradel will not be likely to coincide with you there." This was said with a playful emphasis which momentarily caused universal silence, and which Jane immediately interfered to break. The tone of the conversation all through was most displeasing to her, and she was glad to have at hand a ready mode of changing it, even though it should be by adding further to Nora's vanity.

"The peculiar character, even the atmosphere of this place," she said, looking up into the dark trees, reminds me of a description of the yew-tree in Sutton Forest, seen by the writer when on a visit there; although but the attempt of a very young poetess, it is really so very appropriate that I will trespass on your patience and read it," added Jane, with a smile, unfolding an envelope.

Nora attempted to snatch the paper; then turned crimson, and looked imploringly at her sister, who began,—

Nigh yon mould'ring tower, there stands a tree;  
An old yew-tree, that silently  
Winnows its branches to and fro  
In the August noontides' hottest glow,  
When the heart of the forest is hushed and lone,  
And only the beetle's sonorous drone,  
Or the tinkling drop from its poise on high,  
Of the autumn leaf as it falls to die,  
Breaks. Yet still, howe'er it be,  
Though the wind die o'er wold and lea,  
At morn or noon, or twilight gray,  
Whether by night, or whether by day,  
Those sad green boughs do wave alway  
With a silent motion hushed and low  
Like changing shadows which come and go  
On grassy lawns when soft winds blow.

And ever the fair light shrinks away  
From the massy frown and silent sway  
Of those waving boughs of haunted yew  
Where never glimmers a sun-ray thro'  
To gild the dusk of the palmy leaves—  
There the budding Spring no beauty weaves,  
No drooping wild flower's lonely bloom  
Lightens within the chilly gloom,  
Which deep'ning downward, flings around  
A wide, wide, ring upon the ground—  
No bird on the homeward wing shall dare  
To muffle its weary pinion there;  
And wild deer hot with the summer fly,  
Tho' apace for rest, shall pass it by.

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Shunning that turf so damp and cold,  
So scant and bare of mossy mould,  
Reddened, like blood-drops newly shed,  
With the crimson berries the old tree bled.

A burst of noisy approbation from Edwin Bradel, and a few apt, but flattering remarks from Mr. Pennet followed, making Jane glow with pleasure.

"It is really not so bad; and such an exact portrait of this place," she said, smiling. "Nora, dear, you will soil your dress leaning against that tree; already you are covered with mould."

But with folded arms, Nora sat quietly, without reply or movement, except that her long wavy lashes raised a moment towards her sister, and then drooped again.

"Come, this is very pretty," said Mrs. Middleton, interrupting; "poetry would do very well, if the grass were not damp, with chill and fever lurking under the trees. Cary, I don't want to be nursing you; nor will Mrs. Troye thank me either for bringing her girls back with colds—which is the way to the boat? which is the way, Mr. Pennet?"

"If you please I will take your arm, Mr. Pennet," said Nora, rising, and heading the party. "I am so very angry with my sister now, that I must keep away from her—pray, walk quickly."

She did indeed appear seriously annoyed ; and it was some time before she spoke to any one but Mr. Pennet again ; a shadow remained afterwards upon her for the rest of the day, and her eyes had now and then an angry light in them when they rested upon her sister.

Ill, however, as this day at Winderpool commenced, unsuccessful a pleasure excursion as it proved to some of the party, its ending was destined to be still more unfortunate ; for while at dinner on the grass, the excessively sultry weather broke suddenly, and distant peals of thunder were followed by the rain with such drench and downpour, that in spite of the best shelter many of the ladies were wet before the carriages came up, and Caroline especially, who wore no shawl over her thin muslin, felt her shoulder get quite cold, and was much out of spirits and tired. Somehow the day had not been a very pleasant one to her either ; the most agreeable circumstance of it was, perhaps, the first sight of the carriage which was to take them all home again.



## CHAPTER XVI.

## PRESENTIMENTS.

ON the following morning, Mrs. Troye was in immediate want of some indispensable household matters, for which the girls must go into Ormiston, "although the weather was unsettled still, and they might get a wetting, and be laid up all the winter in consequence;" probabilities about which there was so much fuss and clatter that at last Nora got impatient and walked off, leaving her mother and Jane to arrange the various objections about mud-boots, shawls, and umbrellas, as they would.

The coldness of yesterday was still between the sisters a sense of estrangement that Jane had resolved to refer to on this walk into town, as she had arranged previously in her mind; and she even decided on the manner of remonstrance, when this fact of Nora's impatient departure, coupled with her marked coldness afterwards when she came up with her on the road, quite checked any attempt at friendliness

or even conversation: for Nora did not once stop or turn to see whether Jane followed, but with her dress tidily gathered together, and her trim boots splashing through the puddles, kept on in silence—an order of march not changed, or scarcely disturbed by a word, until, on entering the suburb of Ormiston, Luke Penrose at the turning of a street almost ran against them.

He was going to the Cottage, and in a state of much distress about a letter just received, telling of the sudden illness of his mother: he must leave for London in the morning, and he put the letter into Jane's hand.

"From the doctor! it must be serious," she answered; "and she has no one to attend her. I will ask mamma to let me go with you: you leave early, I suppose? return with us and I will ask her."

It was, however, ultimately arranged that Luke would write immediately on his arrival, if Jane's presence was required. So, as soon as their commissions were executed, he returned with his cousins to announce his departure at the Cottage. As they walked out, for awhile the conversation kept exclusively on the doctor's letter and the nature of Mrs. Penrose's attack; but when approaching the neighbourhood of Mocton, Jane became busy with her

account-book in the rear, and Luke and Nora were left by themselves in advance.

"I feel as if going to the end of the world, and not on a few hours' journey," he said then; "for independently of the cause, and the anxiety attached to it, the mere fact of parting just now has a melancholy of itself, that I cannot account for: even this very road looks at me like an old friend that I shall never see the same again. Do you believe in presentiments? It is absurd, no doubt, to make so much of going away only for a day or two; but I would give much to be gone and back here again."

"Are you so fond of this place?" asked Nora.

"I don't know whether it is the place, but I merely cannot bear to go now."

"And you think you shall be long away?" she continued, primly looking down at her own very pretty feet: "it is indeed provoking you should go just now; I shall be very lonely."

"I did not think it would matter to you; be sure I'll lose no time in getting back," he replied, taking a long step that brought his face close up to her bonnet-strings; for her head was turned a little aside.

She turned to look at him then; that is, she would have looked at him if her soft lids had not fallen the very moment their eyes met.

"Of course I shall miss you, and 'tis only natural I should, as I have no brother to take me out to dancing parties, and you do very well instead," slowly moulding out her syllables with precision: "it is necessary, you know, to have a relative to save one from being tormented in a ball-room. Mr. Dacer, I suppose, will let you stay away as long as you please?"

"But one single hour out of Ormiston is longer than I please," he answered in a kind of whisper.

"You like Ormiston, and I so hate it," she rejoined, firmly shutting the clasp of her reticule.

"You hate Ormiston?"

"But will find it none the pleasanter when you have left," she immediately added, with a little sigh. "I suppose when your mother recovers, you will remain in London amusing yourself. How I wish I were going too. Dear London!"

"Why should you envy me, Nora? when it feels like leaving half myself to go away. A time was, indeed, when the thought of getting to London, or anywhere away for a season, would have been pleasant; but then I was dissatisfied and unhappy, had no object to live for, no end to gain: before I began to have hope, Nora; that is it: for I have hopes now dearer far than life, and they are all, all of them centred here."

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"Then if contentment be a blessing, you are certainly very well off. I have hopes of my own too; but I fear none of so domestic a turn."

"Is it that you are ambitious? no wonder indeed if you were; for there is nothing, Nora, nothing that you do not deserve, that you may not attain, that surely, if in my power, I would not give you. If you have aspirations, I am not the one to reproach them, for I am myself most ambitious; though seeking but one object, it is yet one of priceless value—infinitely beyond my deserts, if not perhaps altogether out of reach. There is indeed but one light in my heavens, but that light is the sun, and turning from it, darkness is everywhere: that object is here, Nora, in Ormiston, so you can understand why I hate to leave it."

"Can you remember if mamma said anything about cord for the window blinds?" here asked Jane, coming up at the moment, too exclusively occupied with her items to observe the faces of her companions. "She wanted some the other day, yet it is not mentioned in the list. But who is this?—Mrs. Middleton's coachman. How extraordinary! Can anything have happened?"

And they stopped to look after a man who rode by at a remarkable speed. Agreeing, however, that

if anything had occurred, he would have stopped to tell it, they continued their way, and presently arrived at the cottage gate; so that Luke was, by the accident, effectually interrupted, and had no further opportunity of being alone with Nora, or of renewing the tone of their conversation.

It was a disappointment to be so near saying all he wanted to say; to feel that a chance of doing so with success had been offered—offered, and been missed. Even the chance itself developed his own vague longings and hopes: instantaneously gave them shape and definition. His brain began to ferment in consequence, and under the process of exciting thought that naturally followed, rest for the moment became impossible. At the first opportunity, therefore, he gained the garden and slipped up the path leading to Middleton Lodge, then turned straight up hill through the plantation above it with doubled speed, as the footing through the trees became more irregular and difficult. Movement only was what he wanted then, and the violent exercise rendered his mind gradually more tranquil and composed, so that as he crossed the upper boundary fence of the wood into the open pasture he was presently calm enough to endure a thought that had indeed come before—a thought numbing the pulse, and cooling the brain,

and that always moved something farther away the illusion and dreams of self-willed, youthful passion.

It was a thought of Nora, not a doubt of her, although the very shape it took in his mind directly implied doubt. She was very beautiful, very good; unquestionably of talent and remarkable power; but was she of the kind to mate with one whose life must be a patient struggle? If by nature a jewel fitted for rich and gorgeous setting, would she be likely, therefore, to suit a homelier frame? Would there be no risk in asking her to descend even a little?—was it wise of him, or fair to her, wilfully to incur that risk?

This was what his judgment would oppose, and its importance was undeniable; though in the fresh omnipotence of youth he often set the question aside, deciding that by-and-by it would be different, or more easily answered. The future seemed such illimitable space for all good things to happen in, that very likely he would get rich some way; or at the worst might work to the bone, and by the strength of his own right arm win for her all that she deserved. But occasionally, also, the bare facts of the case would press upon him with a clearness and force that fancy could not cope with; and, at the same time, an uncertainty as to the opinions which Nora might herself

hold upon the important point would render him utterly diffident and desponding.

It was into such latter mood he gradually drifted now, leaning upon the outward fence and looking down over the sloping Middleton woods.

At his feet were the shrubberies of the Lodge, their dark green making a powerful foreground to the open view of clear tints and dazzling light lower down, through which the Orme wound a silver serpent—now flashing steel white through clumps of stately oak and elm, in froth and snowy sparkle tumbling over the sounding falls, awhile lost in stretch of wood or wind of sombre glen, and then found again miles away with a farewell sheen plunging into a range of farthest hills, that in the soft shadowless haze of extreme distance seemed as light and fragile as the white sun-cloud resting over them.

His brain slowly settled under the sober action of maturer thoughts, and the influence of the quiet country, of the clear cheerful view beneath, soothed his temper so well that in awhile he began calmly to descend the hill again, but now in the direction of the Lodge.

The gray of evening was fast falling on the irregular lines of masonry muffled in their dense background of forest shrubs; all was so quiet, that a



lagging summer blackbird flew out with a creaking chirp from the flower knot as he approached the house, and a flight of small birds were twittering on the threshold of the half-open hall door; but when more in front Luke saw that a carriage was in waiting at the side door by the conservatory, and he learned presently from the gardener who passed "that Miss Caroline had taken cold after the wetting of yesterday, that there was some fear of its turning to fever, and that Dr. Calent had been suddenly sent for."

Caroline Middleton, in the bloom of her youth and beauty, on the eve of a brilliant marriage, was the last person associated in Luke's mind with illness or misfortune, and the announcement shocked him. The position awaiting her was so like what he would have himself desired for Nora, that it seemed incredible a shadow should come upon it. When the doctor re-appeared, however, it was to confirm the report to the fullest and worst. Caroline was very ill indeed.

At the Cottage the news created such alarm that Jane proposed going to the Lodge at once after dinner—which in spite of remonstrance, and the heavy rain that began, she insisted upon doing, and doing in her own way too; for she would not even

allow Luke to go with her, as in the confusion of a sick house his presence might be an inconvenience. Eventually, therefore, she set off with the housemaid for sole protection, and then Mrs. Troye began to contrive her best to make every one uncomfortable for the rest of the evening; there was no end to her complaints, misgivings, and surmises. "The certainty of rain, the certainty also that Caroline had nothing whatever the matter with her; she was just the sort of over-petted child to think the world must come to an end if her finger ached. And of all nights in the year on this one she particularly wanted Jane at home. There were accounts to settle that could not wait; and as for Nora, it was out of the question: after all the care she cost she could not add four and four together, and was of no use whatever."

The direct result of this fretfulness was to cause Nora's temper to give way; indeed, the ordinary trials of domestic life required no assistance to absorb whatever degree of patient endurance her nature possessed, and the least addition easily overturned the balance. So she took up a book, and remained buried in it, while her father dozed on the sofa, and Mrs. Troye kept talking on peevishly to Luke over her rapid knitting-needles. The inevitable internal gratings of the family were so much

to Nora, that it was growing a habit every evening to become absorbed this way in some one occupation as the only means of escaping their effect; her confirmed silence, therefore, and sustained indifference of manner, meant really less in itself than it disappointed and distressed Luke, who was unaware of her practice, and who, going away in the morning, had naturally expected a far different and more agreeable leave-taking. But in awhile he became more satisfied, for Nora put her book carelessly aside, and passed into the drawing-room to the piano. The piano was a resource, a convenience, often an excuse for going away when the parlour became intolerable.

And shortly after her departure, Luke also went out to look at the night, as he said; adding that he would saunter up to meet Jane. It was a fine night now, the clouds had passed off, and the moon looked out full and clear.

But as he delayed a moment in the hall, the piano came softly through the half open drawing-room door, and at last he pushed it quietly open, feeling the moonlight as he entered pour full upon his face from the window opposite; the room otherwise was in darkness, and over at the piano Nora's muslin dress made a whitish patch in the gloom.

"Is that you, Luke? are you not going up for Jane?"

"Yes! but there is time enough; before eleven will do. If Miss Middleton should be ill, she may want to remain at the Lodge. What a fine night." He crossed the room to the window.

How many gyrations of varied changing thoughts swept over the chords of his mind as he stood there in silence: a sudden fading of all distrust and doubt, a mysterious revival of confidence and hope grew up then, caused—was it indeed only caused?—by a delicate, almost imperceptible softening of her voice. Was the mere inflection of a tone already sufficient to move him from pole to pole? She spoke gently of the melody she was playing, skilfully changing the air now and then to catch his taste, and while that dreamy music continued, the rights of youth only strengthened and grew paramount within his breast, overpowering all sense of caution, all lesser suggestions of a narrow prudence. Presently she left the piano and stood by him, looking out.

"How full the light falls," she said; "see how distinct are the white leaves of the polished laurels; one could almost reckon them. I like this lovely light, travelling over the silent earth, when men and

their small cares have left it for awhile: moonlight excites my fancy, Luke."

"A time may be when you won't like anything on that account, Nora; fancy is a poisonous indulgence, and entails a harsh penalty, as I know from experience. Nevertheless, even I could dream again after all, so seductive and irresistible is the habit, after a bitter, bitter past. I have indeed dreamt again; don't you know I have?"

Still with her broad beautiful brow bending towards the light, Nora did not move; her fingers only were busy with the steel clasp of her waist; and when the deep eyes looked up softly and met his, he gently took the hand from her waist: it was not withdrawn.

"Can you doubt what my dream is, Nora, though I have kept it close, close until this instant? You cannot doubt it, and you will give me hope now, or else an answer which must end suspense at once and also end my dream for ever?"

"I cannot misunderstand you, Luke," she answered, pausing gravely, "yet what am I to do? If I listen only to my own feelings, what of the difficulties and obstacles of which you are aware, and which must prevent me still? What am I to say?"

"Only say this—say if you can return the love of

one to whom you are the only interest of life, the source of every high inspiration and generous thought—whose dream is to sacrifice himself for you, to endow you with all that hand and will can achieve and lavish; who loves you, and by the essence and force of love itself, of love only, has even the bold hope of becoming in some degree less unworthy of you.”

“And why do you love me so much, Luke?”

“I cannot tell; you may be beautiful and accomplished, but I cannot feel that you are so now. I do not see your beauty; were you to lose it, were your intellect to fail, it would make no difference to me—I should not perceive it.”

“Did you never love anybody else so well?” she asked, smiling.

“No comparison whatever is possible; for if I have seen equal beauty, the same attractions, perhaps, in others like you, I have met no one, no one with the same mysterious and deep influence upon my nature. I have thought of you till my brain whirled with alternate hope and pain—thought of the obstacles which divide us; and, though I do not under-estimate or deny their importance, still I have a force within which prompts me to face them all for your sake, to undertake the great responsibility

of your happiness and to ask you to trust me with it."

"If I only dared—could I but see what to do," Nora thought aloud; but, as the words passed her lips, a shadow came between her and the moon, and she had barely time to recover herself before Jane's footsteps were heard already in the porch.

"I am going away in the morning; who knows when I may see you again?" Luke murmured softly: "give me something to take with me, if only one parting word—something that will give me hope; or say at once that I must renounce all thought of you for ever."

There was not an instant for reflection, so quickly plucking something from her sleeve, she left it in his hand, and the next moment was taking off Jane's things, and talking loudly to her in the hall.

Luke's face had a happy light upon it, when, shortly after, he followed into the parlour, also to inquire after Miss Middleton and make excuses to Jane for not going up in time. And the next morning he was off at sunrise, with the silk tassel of Nora's sleeve folded within his breast.

## CHAPTER XVII.

## A MUTUAL SURPRISE.

THE parting interview with Luke left no pleasant impressions on Nora's mind, when she came to reflect over it at leisure; and not only that, but after a few days the consideration of the results which might possibly flow from it became a source of grave and sore anxiety. She had yielded, she thought, only to an unfair union of opportunity and circumstance; Luke had surprised her in a moment of passing weakness, and led her decidedly to commit herself, while as yet her own mind was unsettled and vague. But what was worse, he had been also confirmed, perhaps, in the most extravagant fancies; and it did not seem that an opportunity would soon occur of easily disabusing him, as the accounts from his mother were daily growing most unfavourable.

Indeed, Mrs. Penrose showed so little sign of improvement, that it was at length decided Jane should go up to London to attend her. The case



was one in which a more selfish person could not refuse: so a day or two before her departure, Jane went with Nora to pay a farewell visit to Caroline; who, though over her attack, had not yet quitted her chamber.

When the Troyes arrived at the Lodge, Edwin Bradel, considerably out of humour with Mrs. Middleton, met them there. "He had been disappointed of seeing Caroline again; they were shutting her up when air and exercise would decidedly hasten her recovery; such a fine day she had much better go out; he had sent over the phaeton on purpose to tempt her."

Jane was quite of his opinion, and Nora suggested that it might be precisely on account of his anxiety that he was not gratified. "For no one could forego the pleasure of tormenting a little when the chance offered; it was only unwise of him to exhibit excessive desire when he wanted to obtain an object: it was the worst way of gaining anything." Nora was already beginning to address Edwin with great freedom; sometimes in a tone which even Caroline would scarcely venture upon. "I suppose you have been very anxious all this time?" she added.

"Since Caroline's attack, I have not had an easy moment."

"I did not suppose that gentlemen, even in love, were so sensitive. And when uneasy, how do you pass the time? probably scold the servants, and make the house tremble? I always draw down the blinds, and go to sleep: it is the quietest and best way."

"But it would not do for one engaged: love, you know, being sleepless."

"Blind, certainly: but if sleepless, how then do you dream? for dreaming is essential to the matter, we read."

"Whether or not, whether awake or asleep, I am quite satisfied."

"Well! contentment is itself a blessing."

"No doubt, when one desires nothing beyond perfect happiness, and moreover thinks to have found it."

"As others have thought before you, Mr. Bradel. However pleasant, 'tis by no means an original conceit; fine promise and short performance has been the roll of the world since the first turn."

"I have at all events no reason to mistrust my promise yet; so far it progresses according to seeming—fulfils every expectation: in action, gentle and true."

"But steady and sure, like slow poison," added Nora. "Perhaps it is but feeding you like the ogres in the fairy tales, to make you fit to gobble up."

"What matter? it is pleasant while it lasts. What matter if it be a lingering illusion?"

"Delusion, Mr. Bradel."

"Don't provoke me to wish that in your turn you may find it so."

"That I should find it at all would be as bad a wish; but, indeed, I have never been tempted, nor am I likely to be: no one wants me, fortunately; except Jane, no one else professes to care for me, and she lectures me from morning till night."

"I am not surprised. I think you incorrigible."

"Or unmanageable."

"Either."

"I might be tamed very easily, nevertheless."

"You might like some one to try it; but the venture would be too daring for my taste."

"Your discretion is wise, for I admit it would be pleasant to have a follower to tyrannize over—something to bear one's change of humour; a human spaniel trained to one's smile, to the change of an eyelid; ready for cuff or caress with the same grateful whine."

"Nora is fond of saying what she does not think," Jane here interrupted: "it is her habit to express principles and feelings that she neither believes nor shares; and even well as I know her I am sometimes deceived by it."

"Clear-sighted people are sometimes dull about what occurs even before them," answered Nora, coldly; "sometimes trip over the pebbles under foot. There may be overlooking as there is overdoing, and I have known you overdo before now: are you sure you do know her so very well?"

Here Mrs. Middleton's opportune entrance prevented reply. Mrs. Middleton was happy to see them, but she feared Caroline must disappoint again; as she was not at all well to-day, her night had been restless: indeed, it might be too much if both Miss Troyes went upstairs together—much talk or noise would be injurious. If Jane would come up first alone, they would be the better judge. So Jane and Mrs. Middleton went accordingly, leaving Nora alone with Mr. Bradel, who was at first too much provoked at the disappointment of not seeing Caroline to do other than relieve himself by vague complaints; but of these Nora took no apparent notice, so presently he turned to her, saying—

"It appears that you are not the favourite, or are not to be trusted; evidently Mrs. Middleton has no great confidence in you. She looks upon you as an irresistible distraction: rather an indefinite description; maybe, complimentary, or not, as you like to take it."

Nora replied shortly, then went to the window and sat down. Either she was hurt at the trifling reproof from Jane, or at not being asked upstairs first, or else had changed her humour without any reason at all, as was not uncommon. She had a strange power of commanding the deportment of others, of regulating their behaviour according to the arbitrary disposition of her own temporary mood. If in good spirits, the conversation around her naturally became lively of itself, but if otherwise inclined, it died out, or was sustained only with palpable effort; and such was the case now. Edwin Bradel suddenly found that he had nothing more to say, and Nora opened a book with as much apparent unconcern as if Mr. Bradel of Everley were a league away; as indifferent to his presence as if he were merely the ornamental china clock upon the mantel-piece, ticking loud in the continued silence.

This was a sort of treatment quite new to him, and had complete effect in immediately disordering his habitually easy confidence so much, that he had no resource but to approach the other window and pretend to admire the view; in fact, the view from Middleton Lodge was of recognized beauty, and furnished excellent capital for talk, as he presently discovered.

"For you can see as far as Farren Court from your window, I should think," he said, addressing her formally; "I never noticed how capitally these windows are placed before: indeed a fine sweep, a grand view; but it is better from the hill behind. Have you been there, at the larch screen? that is the place for a house; have you ever been to the larch screen?"

"Very often."

"Still this room is well, very comfortable; what is lost in view it gains in comfort, no disadvantage I consider. It is due south, almost the warmest room I was ever in; the coldest day in winter it is warm here." In awhile he added further, "I hope you are not tired from your walk, Miss Troye."

"What walk?"

"Up here! I hope it did not fatigue you?"

"It is not half-a-mile; why should it?"

"Very true indeed, yet some ladies would faint at half-a-mile: ay, and gentlemen too, I assure you: I know one would not walk half-a-mile to save his life; yet there is nothing like a walk, a walk in the forenoon—a ride is nothing to it. Your sister is a great walker, so was also Caroline before her illness: a pity they won't let her out, there would not be the least

risk; you may believe I would be the last to propose it if there were."

Moving to and fro the leaves of her book, Nora quietly agreed with him and went on reading.

"That book seems very interesting; I daresay it is more poetry," he said, smiling, after a longer pause. "Very likely Mrs. Middleton will lend it to you; would shall I ask her?"

"If you please; it is really so very nice. See, a lady's companion," she answered, holding up the page illustrated with diagrams of crochet and thread work; "but as it is Caroline's favourite, I would not like to borrow it just now until she quite recovers; it would be depriving her of an enjoyment."

"You are very considerate."

"Well, I deserve no praise for it; it is natural to us: ladies are all so——"

"So what?"

"No matter; so inferior to dear Caroline, at all events, and that is all you want to know: there are very few of us like her indeed; perhaps you have not yourself met with such another: at least not lately, and they say you have had some experience."

He laughed carelessly, though the bright colour came upon his cheek: from the position of Nora's

head it was impossible to define the expression of her face exactly, but he felt nevertheless that she smiled also. Nora had the eye of a trout set well back upon her cheek, and could see well around her, and observe him undetected.

"There is a flock of sparrows upon the walk fighting over some corn seeds," he said again, presently, essaying a neutral subject; "how they push at each other—the weak ones beaten off every moment by fresh battalions from the laurestinum. This is an extraordinary place for birds; Caroline has robins in the garden which perch upon her shoulder, feed from her hand, and the wood-pigeons here are the tamest ever I saw: there is one now gravely pacing the gravel, waiting for his mate in the top of the horse chesnut yonder, as much at his ease as if on the tallest pine on Middleton scalp; they never light so near the house at Everley."

But here a sudden noise and a sharp exclamation from Nora interrupted, and brought him round to her window at once; and in the next moment they were both laughing in concert at the start, caused by the Venetian blind which had fallen close to her cheek, frightening her to death, as she said, laughing still, as he came nearer to draw up the blind to its place. He had to lean quite over to



reach the cord behind her shoulder; then to search for her book and gloves, which had dropped so far in behind the chair and the folds of her dress that he must kneel on her foot-stool to reach them, which at last achieved, still on one knee, he presented them to her.

“Thank you, Mr. Bradel,”—a slight change in the voice,—“thank you; what did you want me to look at—I was so startled?”

Now raising her veil and smiling up at him with her splendid eyes, he was face to face, on the same plane—close, very close to those eyes which for a space lay in calm lustre before him—with the light striking full in, bringing out their varied shadowy agate tints in a soft warmth of united blaze. It was the full force of merely perfect beauty, and he met the look with a prolonged confident hardihood which gradually brought a spreading transparent glow over her neck and throat.

But here at once, and without the least premonitory symptoms, the door suddenly opened, and Mrs. Middleton entered before Edwin had quite finished rising. She came up the room in full talk: “Caroline was not to go out, Jane did not think her well enough, and there was besides, a breeze; it would be foolish to incur risk merely for the sake of a day,

when one day would do as well as another—would do as well—as—another,” Mrs. Middleton repeated, as her quick glance changed from one blushing face to the other. What was this—this confusion? What mystery, what stinging, guilty secret, had she come upon? that tell-tale rustling of Nora’s skirt, the convicted guilt plain in his face, as he advanced to address her with attempted ease and struggled through with a conscious sense of awkward failure!

It was as well that Jane should follow the next moment, repeating also that Caroline was harassed after a restless night, and disinclined to leave her room. “But if not in better spirits than at my last visit, she is certainly improved in appearance,” she added, smiling at Edwin; “a little languor is not unbecoming to her, though I know Mrs. Middleton does not agree with me there.”

“Nor do I either,” Nora answered firmly, with a daring calmness, considering that the matron’s gleaming eyes were searching into her face, “for delicacy, even when becoming, is to me always disagreeable. I think it false taste not to admire warmth and colour, and would rather see Caroline ruddy with vulgar health than droop with the pale beauty of the loveliest primrose that ever languished. Don’t you

think I am right? I am quite sure Mrs. Middleton does : that she agrees with me."

Mrs. Middleton, however, made no reply; her mind was too uncertain and anxious then: troubled with vague suspicions; and she remained very silent while the remainder of the visit lasted.

## CHAPTER XVII.


## DEFIANCE.

SOME considerable time went by during which important changes occurred to many individuals of the reader's acquaintance. The summer was deepening into autumn, bringing near the time fixed for the marriage; but before the autumn arrived, a serious calamity fell on Luke Penrose: a circumstance which materially influenced his future character, and marked a sad epoch in his existence. In spite of all that skill or affection could do, Mrs. Penrose's illness proved fatal; and he experienced a shock, which had its effect not only on his spirits and disposition, but in no slight degree upon his destiny also. For immediately after the catastrophe, Lumney insisted on taking him to his shooting lodge in Scotland, in the hope by change of scene to mitigate his grief; and consequently Luke was prevented, as well by absence as by disordered feelings, from interference in or prosecution of those interests which had hitherto

been dearest to him. This occurred also at an important crisis—precisely at a period when every circumstance was pregnant with consequences. For owing to Jane's absence in London during the time of Mrs. Penrose's illness, Nora was left in a great measure either to her own devices at home, or to the sole guidance of her mother; who was not fit to direct, and was daily growing less of a restraint to her. She had meanwhile become a frequent visitor at Everley, and the intimacy with each member of the family there had ripened into close familiarity, so that gradually the thought of Luke, the remembrance of their past life together, and the impressions remaining of it, faded more and more from her mind. Above all, the recollection of his declaration at parting ceased to give her much further uneasiness; it seemed either so long ago, or was itself such a trifling matter after all, when looked at from the distance which sometimes change of mind—or, if preferred, increase of sense—places between actions which we choose to forget or deprecate. It is so pleasant to assume that past subjects of discontent were but the product of some unfair influence, or venial immaturity of disposition, from which the sober, dignified self of the present moment may well be absolved.

The effect of this greater liberty, it may be judged, was not to improve Nora in endurance of the petty vexations of life, or draw nearer the relations with her parents. When Jane was by to talk her down to submission to daily annoyances, her impatience kept within bounds; but that wholesome restraint once withdrawn, home became more than ever intolerable to her: a place where hope stifled in ungenial atmosphere; a purgatory of constant complaints and grating peevishness, like the action of water, day after day filing in upon the spirits. Those hours in other families consecrated to peaceful reunion, were to her especially a season of interior combat and trial; so in awhile she gave up trying to make the best of things, and scarcely noticed her mother's constant remonstrance and captious fretfulness. Mrs. Troye had commenced by spoiling Nora, and when the fruits of her mischievous training became apparent, she thought, with characteristic want of judgment, to repair everything by tyrannical intolerance of faults for which she was herself mainly responsible.

To one of Nora's quick temper and indulged self-will, such treatment could only end in failure, and immediately produce results as lamentable as obvious. The breach between mother and daughter widened therefore to an alarming extent; and when



Jane returned, she was appalled at the change. She came back in uncertain health and depressed spirits, with the tenderest sympathies of her nature developed by the melancholy event she had assisted at, and more than ever determined to seek happiness in secluded home life, in the exclusive exercise of domestic affections. Accordingly her mind was unbraced, most unprepared, for the new state of things; and even her energetic good sense shrank at first from the trouble and jarring discord that awaited her immediately on arriving. For even on the very night of her return her mother began already to complain of Nora; of her inertness, temper, wilfulness, ingratitude. And Jane soon perceived that it was a constant scene of covert sarcasm or direct quarrel between them. Mrs. Troye was incessantly talking at or of Nora to her face; and on the other hand could scarcely ever address her the simplest observation with anything like a certainty of getting a civil reply.

Scarcely had Jane been a week at home, when her mother's intemperate language provoked a more serious quarrel.

"We have a fine lady in the house, who can't get up to breakfast, and must have the day to yawn over her novel," Mrs. Troye said harshly one morning to Jane, as Nora came down later than usual. "What

a pity she has not got her own maid, or that you and I have not time to wait upon her ; there is eleven o'clock positively striking, and all the morning work put back on her account: it is intolerable."

"I am very sorry indeed, mamma, that for your sake I cannot help my headache," said Nora, turning pale.

"And as for my part, I am sick of that head of yours ; I wish you would send for the doctor, and have done with it once for all: we are for ever hearing of it," answered her mother. "If you got up at a proper hour and looked after the dairy, the eggs, butter and breakfast things, as I am obliged to do every morning, and to steal downstairs too, for fear of disturbing that precious head of yours, with the morning sun shining in upon it.—However, next time you shall breakfast in bed. I am determined to put an end to this, and will not have the table littered till noon."

In order to check the discussion, Jane rose to prepare tea ; but Nora prevented her.

"It is no use ; I shan't breakfast: I have no appetite this morning," she said quietly, taking up a book and going to the window, at the other end of the room.

"Her ladyship sulks now: there's more of it," said Mrs. Troye.



"Indeed, mamma, I do not ! I have far too much sense for that," said Nora with frozen coldness ; "I am too accustomed to this to mind what can happen here. One gets familiar with anything at last, and experience has at length taught me so much. Jane, it is no use : send away the tray : I certainly will not breakfast."

"To please me you will," said Jane.

"I should do much to please you, Jane, to be sure," Nora answered in the same cold way : "no doubt you deserve it ; but can I help my stingy nature if it refuses to be generous ? indeed, it is your fault to expect it from me, for you know that I am ungrateful : mamma says every day that I am."

"You are always disrespectful, and I will not suffer it to my face," said Mrs. Troye, dropping the fold of house-linen which she was hemming. "As you will be a child, then expect to be treated as one. Leave the room, if you please."

Nora marked the place in her book and rose at once.

"If it were 'leave the house,' mamma," she said, stopping on the way to the door, "I should have gone down upon my knees to thank you ; but though you do not say so, this must finish some time, certainly : I will make sure of that, at least. The pain is intense,

and deliverance may linger, but it will come at last : it will surely come," she added, gently closing the door.

Once safe away in the bottom of the garden, a torrent of tears followed : a burst of grief and violent complaining, which flowed on unmeasured and unchecked, until even its very excess caused reaction and insensibly lifted up the choking sensation from her heart ; for her spirits were of themselves elastic and quick, distinguished for that rapidly varying temperature common to impulsive natures : and besides, at nineteen 'tis so easy to forget and renew—there is such abundant assurance in the long future to compensate for any disorder of the passing moment. With hope looking on and fancy mixing the colours, it is easy to take the vermilion, the blue, and the gilding, and smear out a fine gaudy picture, until the senses reel and grow dazzled over it.

So, while the tears were still wet upon her cheek, Nora began to brighten up again, and look forward as eagerly and as actively as if hope had never known failure before. She saw so many beautiful things, far away indeed from her actual position, but quite possible and within reach of her productive imagination, that she began rapidly to lose herself in unreal combinations and vague projects of indefinite ambition. The

pomp and pride of life, the pleasures and prizes of the world, one by one flickered up in a mirage of rainbow pageantry to seduce and tempt her; even the very darkness of the present clouds served but to intensify the flickering, uncertain light in which she saw promise of every happiness in prospect: herself emancipated, delivered from incompatible circumstances, and reigning, no matter how; but reigning certainly, and by the supreme title of all too—through the grand divine right of beauty only, the perfection and pride of self. What a contrast, then, to her life hitherto; how it would indemnify for the narrowness of her present lot!—a vast power to be exercised only for the highest motives and noblest interests; her influence all for good, to exert her own tastes upon society, to remodel and correct it, to diffuse universal happiness, and be loved, admired, and worshipped accordingly.

Nora had already thought herself high into the third heaven of terrestrial bliss, when the false Icarian plumage dissolved treacherously, and in an instant she was level with the mere earth again; for an accident came rudely to scatter the tinsel and spangles of her glittering dream, and thrust upon her not only the consciousness of her actual condition, but even bring back the bitterest sense of poignant envy it could foster. Attracted by a noise of coming carriage-

wheels, she had mounted on a seat by the hedge, just in time to see the Everley state equipage move solemnly by in gorgeous magnificence of plush and of powder, with every attribute of dignity and imposing splendour. Caroline only was with Mrs. Bradel: Caroline, with a new tinge of health upon her cheek, dressed in pretty light things, and looking so fresh in the sunny interior of the carriage, with a quiet smile upon her soft, fair face, that Nora felt herself at once grow dark and ugly by contrast. She watched still behind the laurel leaves after the carriage had passed, throbbing with increasing envy, and her mind fast narrowing inward upon itself.

“She is to have it all—she has it already,” at length she murmured, with a sense of pain; “and I must still wait on in my misery while she enjoys every happiness! Why is there such difference? She is fair, very fair indeed, and I am dark; yet, otherwise, in what am I surpassed by her? what other advantage has she beyond me to justify this immense, cruel difference?”

At the words a voice behind interrupted her.

“Nora, where are you? what are you doing there, child?” asked Mrs. Troye. “Here are some things want mending, do you hear? Look over these stockings, and then I want you in the nursery to see

about your father's shirts: once for all, you must learn to do something," and she placed on the seat a wicker basket filled with stockings and muslin.

"See, Davis!" she added, advancing to the gardener at work farther on; "that rhubarb is all overgrown; why don't you dig it up? and the beds by the lodge are as hard as the road: unless one watches you from morning till night you do nothing; and there! the rose celeste broken across: the beautiful rose Mr. Lumney gave us; how provoking. Nora! how was this, who did it—the rose celeste, Nora?"

But no voice came in reply; and when Mrs. Troye turned impatiently to seek her daughter, she found the seat empty, and the basket of stockings overturned, with its contents strewn upon the walk.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## AN INSINUATION.

THE ungenial atmosphere of home began at length to produce a further result, and to affect not only Nora's disposition, but even her appearance: the shadows of her eyes had deepened, her rounded cheek was losing finish, its grain and colour fading; she grew thinner, and it did not become her; the remarkable clearness of her voice was also missed sometimes, and in the end Jane became really alarmed for her health.

"The one thought of my life, Nora, is but to make you happy, if you would only let me try," she said, one day that there was an unusual return of confidence between them. "Why look at the worst side, and always persist in not giving things a chance? Even the darkest moment has some little consolation and light, if one will but be wise and seek it; and as proof of that," she added with a smile, putting a letter into Nora's hand, "here, I was only waiting for an opportunity yesterday of giving this to you."

"From Luke?" Nora turned very pale. "I thought they intended remaining some time in the north. Did you expect him so soon?" she asked.

"But the plan has been changed. Mr. Lumney writes, that as Luke is anxious to return to his work, he thinks it the best thing for him; and I am of the same opinion," answered Jane: occupation will be the best and readiest distraction. He must stay here, and we will do our best to make the house pleasant for him; it may be possible insensibly to dispel, or else considerably to mitigate his grief, and I am very glad he is coming."

Nora felt a sudden sinking down within at this unexpected news, as if some cherished contingency were at once destroyed by it: it was so strange that he should return precisely at the moment when she was quite occupied with other thoughts and far different impressions; and surprise sometimes affects so oddly. But, however, "she was very glad also," she said, and looked up blankly into her sister's anxious face.

There was no further allusion to the subject between them again; and the confidence between the sisters seemed henceforth to lessen daily. Remarks referring to Luke's interests and prospects were listened to with mysterious silence by Nora, and in

the midst of a state of extreme domestic disunion at the cottage, when her capricious temper was at its height, Luke suddenly returned.

So much had passed over him since, a period of such utter darkness, that it seemed all after time must remain tinctured by it—that the shadow of death must hereafter lie between the light of his past youth, and move it back for ever. Perhaps it is an instinct of our spiritual origin, yearning for the endless, that leads us so easily to forget the terms of our changing existence, and to assume that deep impressions, because deep, must necessarily be also permanent and ineffaceable. We forget that all things have their season to fade and renew; and besides that mere lowly human nature has its own implanted instincts, which will, under certain circumstances, be as surely obeyed as those of higher origin: that youth, for instance, must enjoy its essential rights, no matter what influence essay to check or depress it for a time; that it must rise again and again triumphant through all barriers, and claim at last the divine land of promise as its own fair birthright.

And so at once it felt like returning from a distant voyage to Luke, when he placed his hand on the old entrance gate again—like coming out of darkness into



unexpected light—so mightily at sight of the old places did the quick life re-invest him again; for each tree, and stone, and feature of the familiar landscape had vivid memories attached, that wakened of themselves; and a sense of returning happiness came with them, too strong for even his grief to resist.

“We must do without the Troyes henceforth,” Mr. Pennet said, in dialogue with his friend Edwin, referring to Luke’s re-appearance: “the *cousin* has returned, you know; so our pretty friend will now have more interesting business to engage her at home by all accounts. Her absence will be a loss, and I regret it, for with all deference to the taste of my friend Mrs. Middleton, I think her one of the nicest girls I ever met.”

“Doesn’t Mrs. Middleton like her? I was not aware of that.”

“Well, it is a jealous world, and you rarely find the mother of a good-looking girl ready to praise another who might possibly class as a rival; a natural weakness, though I cannot in this case see any ground of rivalry whatever; for the two ladies are of different types, opposite as the poles: so opposite in complexion and in character, that there is no resemblance at all. Besides, if comparison were possible, it must be so much in Miss Middleton’s

favour, that Mrs. Middleton's dislike to her is unintelligible; it is only near her that even Miss Troye looks sometimes plain."

"Plain! not at all."

"Well, if you examine, you will find quite as good features in any other tolerable face; though, to be sure, she is admired: that is undeniable. It is a fact also that many men in town would be glad to stand in Penrose's place: she has certainly good eyes, and ladylike manners."

"I never believed that story about the cousin; it is mere Ormiston talk!" answered Bradel. "Do you think it likely she would marry a pauper like him? On the face of it, now, is it likely?"

"There is for and against it, certainly," replied Mr. Pennet, with decision; "yet she appears to me to be just the one for a freak of that kind; those highly gifted natures are sometimes uncertain and unaccountable: and have you not observed about her of late a strange thoughtfulness, at times, an absence of interest in society, that looks like a confirmation of the matter; evidence of something akin to a youthful entanglement? How do you explain her indifference otherwise? for it is certain that of all who admire her, not one can reasonably boast the least encouragement. Even Seaton, who has property,

and stands well for the baronetcy against his presumptive cousin, the present heir—even he, I am convinced, has no chance whatever.”

“Is Seaton positively serious about it? He never is about anything.”

“Without doubt; but it is no use whatever, for she won’t look at him: I have not noticed her as familiar indeed with any one as with ourselves here; but that is explained by your engagement. She, of course, considers you a safe person, with whom freedom can have no meaning; or else, may be, her pride is touched at your habitual indifference and rather nonchalant demeanour, and as a point of honour or of vanity, she may try to win attention from you. You have so decidedly the manners of a man whose affections are disposed of: there is a sort of aggressive carelessness about you, that no lady could be expected to submit to. Certainly, of all the people in the house, you seem to appreciate her the least.”

“But I do appreciate her,” said Bradel. “What reason have you for supposing otherwise?”

“Now your mother is absolutely in love with her,” Mr. Pennet continued, never heeding. “It was only yesterday that Mrs. Bradel, after praising Miss Middleton, and rejoicing at your luck, said that were she to select your wife herself, but one other person of

her acquaintance would cause her a moment's hesitation. 'Probably the young lady at present in the house,' said I; but when I mentioned that Miss Troye was engaged to Penrose, she was perfectly amazed, and agreed it was just as well you had never thought of her."

"But is she really engaged?" asked Bradel, after a reflective pause; "it is such an incredible absurdity."

"It is a sacrifice, no doubt; but I really do believe it," added Mr. Pennet, going away and leaving his friend very thoughtful about a matter concerning which he obviously could have no sort of interest whatever.

## CHAPTER XIX.

## DISSOLVING VIEWS.

"ALL that glitters is not gold." Nothing in this world is as pleasant as it looks, or realizes anticipations:—a trite truism, which Luke commenced personally to appreciate promptly after his return. Although apparently then in the most amiable position, in closest companionship of an attractive and beautiful person to whom he was sincerely attached, enjoying unrestricted intercourse with her each day until the ruddy autumn sun blazed down through the western firs above the hill—and under the circumstances one can scarcely imagine a more desirable or agreeable arrangement—yet in fact it was far less pleasant than it looked.

In the first place an important difference was caused by a decided and obvious alteration of Nora's manners to himself. A habit of increased reserve, an absence of former familiarity was so evident, that not only did Luke become conscious of less intimacy with

her than before, but moreover was certain of becoming less intimate every day. He seemed to retrograde in the same measure as opportunities of advancing in her favour were multiplied, and beyond question was more constrained with Nora when absolutely alone than at any other time. Her mind seemed to be the under operation of some process to which he had no cue. Not only did he suspect her opinions to have changed on points where change was of importance to himself; but sometimes even she went the length of declaring that they were, and this in a variety of ways more or less direct.

Thus, for instance, when it became known that Robert Boyce, with nothing but a place in the Customs, had proposed for Miss Lytton, Nora did not fail to improve the occasion by enlarging on the dishonour of such a course—"When a gentleman was not in position to make a girl happy he should not seek to marry her."

"It is the first time I learn that happiness and wealth are synonymous with you," Luke answered gravely.

"I know you are all for the old-school sort of thing," she replied, "long engagements and true lovers' knots: Mr. and Mrs. Papillon must marry on Valentine's day, and live upon comfits. It might

do very well too if youth would only wait, and age did not make one grow cross and ugly."

"There may be worse faults than either age or ugliness," he added.

"To be sure, *poverty*, for instance. Look at Mrs. Captain MacTaggart if you want a proof of that: six children, and half-pay. I wish you had called with us there the other day, to see the kitchen-maid, the mended carpets, and faded furniture; with children's hands on the curtains, the door handles soiling one's gloves, and dreadful flavours steaming through the dingy house. It was your 'love in a cottage,' Luke; which is very well, I don't deny, in its way; but so, also, are carriages, jewels, fine company, and fine feathers, believe me."

"Colonel Toper, at your service then, if you think so. And, in your place, I should certainly try it," was the reply.

"And you shall have bride-cake, and dance at the wedding, if I catch him; but who knows, cousin, I'll maybe do better."

"Pray, how much better would you like?" asked Luke, leaning back to get sight of her as she stood something behind; how much higher?"

"Best, if possible, at your service; tip-toe on the topmost step, and then up farther, as far as ever my fingers may reach."

“Shall I hold the ladder for you, Nora, lest it slip? A fall is rarely becoming, and if my arms were ready to catch you it might be convenient.”

“Indeed! your arms—a fine thing, surely that would be,” but here she stopped, for at the moment an object outside brought her quickly to the window. Then, crying out that it was Mrs. Bradel’s servant, she went into the garden. As it happened, she remained so long away, that losing patience at last, Luke rose to ascertain the cause of delay, and then saw that Jane was talking to Nora outside on the walk; he overheard them also quite distinctly.

“I shall go about my things directly; this time it will be a long visit, I am sure,” said Nora. “You may as well assist me, or else go and ask leave from mamma at once; for the carriage is to come in the morning, and I shall have scarcely time to be ready. How kind of Mrs. Bradel! Look at the note; she wants you to come also, but I suppose there is little chance of that?”

“You are going, then?” enquired Jane, quietly, handing back the note.

“Going! I am going mad with joy.”

“Only as Luke is here, I thought it might be as well to wait,” Jane added, with some hesitation. “Any other week will do quite as well, and he pos-



sibly may be disappointed if you go away just now. Perhaps he won't remain if you do?"

"Why not? won't mamma, you, every one else, be here. Besides, what has he to say to it? he would on the contrary feel much annoyed if, on his account, I gave up a pleasure: at least so he ought; and this is a great pleasure, indeed. But it is a drawback that we are in mourning," Nora added quickly, "as I can't wear my blue silk; and the other dress, though not unbecoming, is too matronly, and spoils my figure. However, as absolutely black, it must be a bit of scarlet; a ribbon or flower in my hair will make things do very well. You know black and red always become me; they really are my own colours."

"If you are determined to go then, I suppose you had better see about it at once; I have nothing more to say," said Jane, coldly moving towards the house.

And from behind the window blind Luke heard every word of this. The light indifference of her words hurt him sufficiently; but the matter of her conversation hurt him more. So the very mourning which, out of respect to his mother, decency compelled her to wear, was felt to be an inconvenience and a grievance. Evidently she but wanted a

tolerable excuse to escape from what her vanity with difficulty accepted as a sort of disgrace. At that moment the scales seemed to fall for an instant from Luke's eyes, and let him see much that was inexplicable in her conduct hitherto. It was by no means a pleasant discovery, and brought little contentment. He leant his brow against the sash, and plainly asked himself if Nora was entirely false or only fickle—a trifling person, excited at the prospect of visiting a great house, and intoxicated with mere empty giddiness?

But while still debating the question in the same abstracted attitude, Nora burst radiant into the room; she was quite happy now with the prospect of coming pleasure; her temper had amazingly improved, and she was consequently ready to be on perfect terms with her cousin and with all the world. She wished indeed especially for peace with him, and already sincerely regretted her previous smartness. But it was late; and her attempts at reconciliation or reparation were out of season. He chose to be absurdly grave during the last few hours they passed together, and so decidedly resisted advances from her, that at length she desisted, and pettishly left him to indulge his mood. If he chose to be so unkind merely because she took a little enjoyment, it was not surely her

affair—such tyranny as that was not to be endured; and it was also quite as unjust of Jane to affect a serious face, and try to make her feel vaguely in the wrong for merely accepting a friendly invitation. So Nora went away, leaving things unsettled as they were, and a few days afterwards Luke returned to Ormiston.

## CHAPTER XX.

## ON THE TERRACE.

“You are back to the office, then; going into harness again? and quite right,” Lumney said to Luke, when the latter came to announce that determination. “A man should always work when he is able. I would myself but for confirmed habits; and when one has confirmed habits, I hold it as good an excuse for idleness as any other. If in my youth I had had your advantages—such another ‘memento mori’ as myself to put my hand upon, with something to do, and also the mind to do it—I might have been on the whole perhaps a distinguished and respectable person. But take warning by me, and beware of indolent dilettanteism and the luxury of bachelor bliss. The sweet *far niente* has ruined my career, and truly made the happiness of my existence. No doubt there is nothing like it, but my life has been for myself, and not for others to imitate. And do you never mind, but hurry on fast through the world

your own way. Life has many things worth having: even if one should miss what is highest and best, don't suppose when the *gross lot* is drawn, that the remainder are all worthless blanks. There are other tickets in the lottery; other interests on our own level, and on easy range, worth having, believe me; even suppose you don't think so now, you will by-and-by, so lose no time in getting your hands free, and being master of yourself."

Luke went gravely back to his work; and so far from needing effort to approach it now, it was a refuge and resource to him, a means of keeping thought away, of preventing the anxiety and sinking down of hope that came with reflection. For certainly hope was somewhat duller than formerly—no longer shone in colours of the old permanent hue. Not that he cared less for Nora: desire does not become more feeble because the object of it be moved farther out of reach; but he had a less present, less impatient sense of longing regarding her; perhaps the sentiment was therefore all the deeper, because more provident and mature. He resolved at all events to forego every opportunity of meeting her for awhile, because it seemed as if some impending crisis would come itself to settle things without direct interference on his part; so he buried himself in

employment, and shrank from any sort of confidence even with Lumney. Indeed, his friend did not press it. Lumney was already sufficiently well informed on Luke's affairs to be independent of direct explanation, and by this time had also seen enough of Nora to have also strong opinions of his own regarding her; but these he kept private. He must find out that for himself, he thought, with full confidence, trusting likewise to the wisdom of time.

Though Luke faithfully abstained from meeting Nora, he could not avoid hearing frequently of her; indeed the talk then rife of private theatricals in contemplation at Everley interested him particularly, as probably Nora would be prominently concerned in them. And it happened further, late one afternoon, on the way to Mr. Dacer's private residence, that he met Mr. Pennet near the Everley gate, who gave him the latest particulars thereupon. "Those charades were so successful, that the next performance was to be on a grander scale; a more extended audience was to be sought amidst families of the neighbourhood. It was even a question of sending to London for dresses and scenery; and, moreover, exactly as Luke had suspected, Miss Nora Troye held a prominent *rôle* in them. Her acting was the leading feature of their success."

This intelligence did not exactly produce the lively pleasure Mr. Pennet seemed to expect it should, and Luke accordingly civilly declined his invitation to pass up through the Everley grounds; although that would have considerably lessened the distance to Mr. Dacer's, and, further, would have likewise proved a pleasure, as well as a convenience; for he must certainly have met his cousin then, as, together with Caroline, she was found walking on the terrace when Mr. Pennet reached the house. It was so very warm, that Nora had come out in her evening costume with uncovered shoulders, and Mr. Pennet paused to look at her with new surprise ere he passed up-stairs. She was really getting more decidedly beautiful every day.

"You have been into town; did you call at the club for my letters?" Edwin Bradel asked, throwing up the window of his dressing-room, and languidly leaning out on the sill as Mr. Pennet entered. "How is any one to be expected to dress this weather; it is as hot as midsummer, and Stephens actually came to ask awhile ago if I would have the fire lighted. I shall certainly discharge him. Was anything doing? any news in town? I am now altogether out of the world."

"Well, nothing that you care for, but what you

know of already: only the story about Penrose and Miss Troye," replied Mr. Pennet, carelessly. "It is said to be quite settled: and I should not wonder, for I happened to meet him at the gate just now; and he has all the air of an engaged man. However, on account of his mother's death, nothing can be immediate. By-the-by, Lynch wants to see you about your boat: well I remembered it," Mr. Pennet added, for "there is some difficulty with the harbour-master as to the new moorings, and he wants positive and immediate directions. It appears she obstructs the fair-way of the river at present, and must move inside the east buoy. I am not clear on nautical matters or on the merits of the question; but the upshot is that Lynch has got a week's notice to quit, and wants to see you immediately: he will come here in the morning; I told him about ten."

"That boat has been a continued torment this year," said Bradel, with ill-humour; "and if she went gently to the bottom some night, it would be a happy riddance. Obstruct the fair-way? Nonsense. It is mere spite of Thornton, because I would not sign his memorial to the Admiralty last year. Why, the *Cynthia* moored in the middle of the channel these three seasons, and nothing was said of it."

"If you rich people had everything your own way,



my dear fellow, you know, we could never put up with it. Those are the inevitable inconveniences of property—the only consolation our poverty has left. But see, the ladies are dressed already,” added Mr. Pennet, coming to the window, leaning out familiarly over Bradel’s shoulder. “And how very well Miss Middleton looks to-day! how becomingly dressed; near her the other seems plain, almost vulgar even. Certainly it is no advantage to Miss Troye to compare with your young lady; and viewed thus together, it is not Penrose one would envy, I should think?”

As he spoke the ladies passed together on the terrace, slowly walking to and fro; and, indeed, Caroline did look well, with a light shawl drawn over her evening dress, that gave additional height and elegance to her perfect figure. There were pretty glittering things about her, also most becoming to her graceful beauty; fresh ribbons and laces, pearls on her wrists, pearls woven in her soft fair hair, and trinkets and bracelets that sparkled lightly and with enhanced effect beside Nora’s plain mourning and simple toilet. For the latter was all in black: except one vermilion spot, a blood-red geranium blossom in the thick masses of her splendid hair, she wore no ornament; nor colour either, save when a ray from

the setting sun lit up behind, shedding a soft roseate reflection on her uncovered perfect shoulders.

Not only was the character of Nora's beauty heightened, but the expression even of her least movement gained directly from contrast with Caroline. Her clear ringing voice rose distinctly above the other's subdued and softer tones; the precise rounded words came out, distinct and well chosen, as she passed on with a confident ease, most opposite to the feminine dependence and retiring mildness of her companion's manner. There was an assumed superiority on Nora's part that even Caroline herself unconsciously acknowledged, as with a creeping presentiment she drew her shawl close as against some dread mysterious chill. What was it of late that brought sometimes this sense of undefined anxiety and misery, taking the form of a vague, selfish fear which quite absorbed the genial essence of her nature, and filled it with unfriendliness? Why was she sometimes impelled to like Nora less, and of all times least when alone together thus?

As in obedience to that troubled thought, she now looked inquiringly into Nora's face, with strange doubtful timidity, Edwin from the window above had full leisure minutely to scan his mistress's features. Perhaps he was not quite of Mr. Pennet's favourable

opinion just then: it might not have appeared that she was unusually beautiful, so strikingly superior to Miss Troye. The lot in store for Luke Penrose, perhaps, might have looked too nearly on a level with his own to be quite agreeable; for, rich and great as he was, heir to acres and a name, what right had the other to equality of happiness with him? Comparison between them was in itself a kind of wrong; yet even to his presumed partial eyes the ladies on the terrace might well compare.

And yielding to the calm influence of the hour, Edwin continued to watch them thoughtfully. The stillness of the garden also inclined irresistibly to reflection; it was so pleasant to hear the voices mingle with the clear splashing of the wide marble fountain, that alone disturbed the deep silence, as the great sun sank gorgeously in grand calm, leaving a furnace of glowing orange above the hill, shooting out broad lurid lines of dying purple far into the grey eastern sky.

“Allons! you are man of the house, and may be as late as you please, but I must conform to prescribed rules and see about dressing,” Mr. Pennet said presently, moving away, and leaving his inattentive friend still lounging thoughtfully at the window.

## CHAPTER XXI.

## AN UNLUCKY CHANCE.

LATER on this evening the large cedar sash of the drawing-room window was thrown up, and seen from the garden the family grouped inside it made a pretty picture. Nora prominently placed, the principal foreground figure, with her white round arm resting on the casing; but more distinguished by a marked vivacity of manner, as she sometimes laughingly turned to address Mr. Pennet or Edwin on either side. She was very beautiful, then; a thrilling sense of inward pleasure told her so; she felt the admiration of the eyes around her, and her spirit rose and quickened with the sense of it. The crimson satin hangings behind, lowered in hue by the soft tones of twilight, harmonized well with her dark costume, and gave a finish and rich effect to the picture. Now and then, the drowsy twang of some roving beetle hummed by, or a brushing of wings came quite close, as a late crow glided northward to the rookery.

And the deep stillness yet pervading the atmosphere was also in agreeable keeping; the great wide heavens in grand repose, with a sinking melancholy autumn tint yet lingering in the west.

"Though calm at present, I do not trust it nevertheless," Mrs. Bradel said, presently. "This treacherous quiet seems to foretell a storm, and we shall certainly have rain to-night; for already the birds have disappeared, and a cloud gathers on Farrel Hill. If the gardeners have gone without taking in the plants, our petunias will suffer. I wish we had Jane Troye awhile to superintend the garden; for I am myself too deficient in patience, in skill, and, indeed, in perseverance, to be of much use: nor has Caroline much the advantage of me either (with a smile), for the garden at the lodge is certainly very inferior to Jane's."

"Employ me for a season, Mrs. Bradel," said Nora, promptly: "I never have exactly tried gardening yet; but as I don't find difficulty in doing anything when others must do my bidding, I might succeed in it, as it is only putting my own hand to work which upsets me. Shall I to-morrow arrange a list of the flowers intended for the show? though I cannot indeed to-morrow, on account of my part—my odious part, I forgot that. It was you, Mr. Pen-

net, proposed those elaborate charades, and thereby changed our amusement to an irksome task; inducing us to undergo a world of trouble with only the certainty of being ultimately laughed at for our pains. However, it is certain I can't learn my part, for I have tried my utmost, and find it altogether out of the question; so some one else must take my place, or the whole affair will utterly fail. What if we were to elude the difficulty by abandoning the project altogether? What do you say, Caroline; would it not be the easiest way? Suppose we set the carpenters to pull the theatre down to-morrow, and have done with it once for all?"

Caroline at the moment was inattentive, and only started at being directly addressed.

"But you are always for what every one likes," Nora continued: "so different from me. I am never without a way of my own, and seldom feel hesitation either in expressing it freely: at least when a gentleman is in the case, when it is one that I do not like, he is seldom left long in doubt about it."

"Under circumstances, that might be the truest kindness," said Mr. Pennet.

"And the most disinterested also, as one can't reasonably expect the least credit for it," answered Nora, idly unclasping her fan. The hair parting with

a fine sweep off her open brow, as she inclined towards Edwin, displayed her forehead to the best advantage; but, the large lustrous eyes, although opening in his direction, did not at the same time notice that Caroline had risen erect upon the sofa, and that Mrs. Bradel observed her now with a curiously awakened interest. The vivid consciousness of triumph, however, was too intense for prudence; her spirits were at the moment exalted far above reflection, and as deeper shadows came over the fading room, she sat in the lessened area of light by the window, like a magic queen of night: like some fascinating creation of a fantastic dream sweeping her glittering fan to and fro, while rising darkness seemed to obey the spell, and gathered denser around.

But as the ringing tones of her voice floated out wide upon the garden, Nora little suspected to whose watchful ears they reached—what an eager witness of every look and movement of hers then lay concealed in the skirt of shrubbery below the flower-knot.

For so it was. Luke, returning late from Mr. Dacer's, had taken the shorter way home through the Everley grounds, and being accidentally attracted by the sound of voices, had approached the house and detected his cousin.

“So there is an end of it all now, at last,” he muttered, in awhile rising from his concealment as the dusk deepened, and across the garden the figures in the window grew shadowy and indistinct. “I have been blind and dull past belief; but now at length I have done with her for ever. I shall never meet her again: shall cast her aside, abjure and renounce all thought of her at once.”

He turned rapidly away as he spoke—away down the steep plantations. But it was not so easy as he anticipated to abstain, at least, from thinking of his cousin; for on reaching the main road, he found that at the moment it was impossible for him to think of anything else, and immediately, therefore, he regretted his precipitancy in quitting his position: something in his own mind connected Nora with a thought so extravagant and improbable, that it seemed but right for him, for every one with an interest in her, at once to ascertain if such a wild, improbable suspicion as that were supported by a shadow of evidence. No scruples prevented him from playing the spy in such a case; the end seemed of importance sufficient to authorize the use of any means. So presently retracing his steps, he returned again to the window.

It was now entirely dark, and the party having



quitted their former position, were variously grouped round the tea-table; but as the room was brilliantly lighted, Luke had a more perfect view than before.

In some time after his arrival, Mr. Pennet abruptly rose and left the room, then stood awhile in the hall door as if about to come into the garden; but presently his light passed upstairs through the lobby windows, then along the wing, until it stopped in one room and remained there: Mr. Pennet had merely snatched a moment to write his letters and see after his affairs. Shortly afterwards old Mr. Bradel entered, momentarily causing a visible effect, for chairs were placed, and places changed. He shook hands with Nora, and sat by her; but soon quitted his chair again: then his son took it.

Nora was placed nearest to the window, and Edwin sat beyond, farther into the room; occasionally full under the light, when in talking he accidentally bent towards her now quiet profile. How delicate and fine that profile looked in the streaming white light of the chandelier! Already it was changed in character; had lost the hard cold look of merely triumphant pride: it was more gentle, more like Nora's face; and her fingers passed to and fro about the fine angles of her mouth, also with an absent movement, quite in harmony with the mild, thoughtful expression. It was

exactly as she ought to look, in Luke's opinion, and he breathlessly drew nearer, afraid to lose a passing change or movement of the features. "If she would but turn something more! Could I but once see clearly into her eyes, I would know exactly what to infer." Scarcely was the wish uttered, however, than there was at once an absolute and total eclipse; for a servant went round the room drawing down the window-blinds one after the other.

Luke had scarcely realized the effect of this vexation, when he simultaneously perceived it to be the most favourable accident which, under the circumstances, could possibly have occurred; for as the centre window was still open on account of the heat, nothing evidently would be easier than to slip close to the window and quietly push the blind aside. It was now so dark that there would be no risk whatever, and presently the piano was heard—the first chords of an accompaniment; this at once decided him, for if he could not see, he might certainly hear very well what was going on in the room.

On trial the experiment answered admirably. A friendly irregularity in the blind allowed him perfectly to see one division of the room, and he got into position exactly as the accompaniment merged into a song. The performer was not in view; but as it

was one of her own songs, he recognized it as readily as the clear voice itself.

Oh ! come when mournful echoes ring,  
And the last throstle pipes his catch ;  
When the swift swallow's wanton wing  
Dips close beneath the smoking thatch.

Or later, when the deep'ning sky  
In dreamy twilight softens all;  
When in the night-wind's broken sigh  
The ivy whispers on the wall.

Come, then, and let thy footsteps be  
As hushed and soft as snow on snow,  
And like a shadow o'er the lea,  
Steal to the tryst of long ago.

I'll wait until the moon's pale light  
Fades in the dawn—until I see  
The last stars glimmer cold and white,  
I still will hope, and wait for thee.

Caroline happened to be near the window, directly opposite to Luke; and while the music continued, the unusual expression of her features by degrees fixed his attention there to the ultimate exclusion of other objects; for there was an eagerness—a look of painful excitement—so foreign to the character of the face, and so much at variance with its ordinary artless simplicity, that the change was in her doubly impressive. But when the song ended, during the hum of compliment and laughter which ensued, Luke per-

ceived her cheek suddenly blotch with a dark spot, and her glance change quickly at some object farther beyond his range. His curiosity as well as his interest was, therefore, so much engaged watching her, that he was momentarily altogether forgetful even of Nora; when his observation was violently interrupted by feeling a tight grasp upon his collar, with "So, my al-fresco friend, be good enough to account for yourself," uttered in familiar tones; and Luke found himself face to face with the last man he cared to meet just then—with Mr. Pennet.

After one moment of horrible agony, then the natural excuses, as a matter of course, followed. Mr. Pennet immediately recognized Luke, apologized, and explained. "From his room he had observed a figure traverse the garden, and naturally curious to know what it meant, came down to see. He had given him a start, he perceived; but presumed Luke would excuse the rudeness of the seizure, as it was done altogether in error."

But far the worst followed immediately; for the noise outside had attracted attention in the room, and at once the window filled with eager crowding faces.

"Why, positively it is Luke! What does he want? Why did you give us such a fright? Can you tell the meaning of this, Mr. Pennet, why

my cousin is here? and what the matter is?" asks a familiar voice.

"The matter is," said Luke, with an effort to preserve his identity amidst the overwhelming whirl and confusion of all his senses, "that coming down through the grounds from Mr. Dacer's, I was attracted by the music, and thinking to recognize my cousin's voice, stopped at the window to listen. Then——"

Here Mr. Pennet came to his relief, and good-humouredly finished the awkward explanation to every one's apparent satisfaction.

"You gave us a fright then, and it seems got one yourself also in return; so 'tis all fair," said Bradel, laughing: "decidedly you are as white as a sheet—but come in. That Moorish fashion of watching at balconies seems scarcely suitable for our climate, and very likely gives one an appetite. Come, supper will fortunately be ready immediately—come in."

As may be supposed, however, Luke, only anxious to escape quickly out of sight, made the best excuse he could, and hurried away; leaving his conduct and its apparent motives to be further construed as it might, and especially leaving his cousin Nora excessively provoked at the whole affair: for this time Luke had not only surpassed himself in imprudence,

but had, moreover, to a certain extent, compromised her. It was, indeed, evident that his indiscretion involved her; for every one looked so unsparingly conscious afterwards, that if Mr. Pennet had not kindly persevered in directing the conversation on other topics, she could not have endured the very shame of it. Mr. Pennet was always so full of consideration for others, and had ever such ready tact in doing things at the proper moment: it was his speciality to be always in time; so that afterwards, on his way upstairs, it happened that his candle blew out while just passing Edwin's dressing-room, and he went in naturally to re-light it.

"What! not in bed yet," he said, finding his friend in his dressing-gown, reflectively extended on the sofa. "We must be late this evening, for I can scarcely keep my eyes open; besides, I have to be in Mocton by eight o'clock to-morrow: at present I can't understand how to manage it. Fortunately, I am not well off; for if rich, I should be so horribly lazy. Every sensible man must hate work as sincerely as I do; and does, I have no doubt, only that really sensible men are generally too wise to admit the entire truth."

"I have no fancy for sleep," answered Bradel, indifferently; "you may as well sit awhile and talk."

“I suppose you are nervous after the adventure of to-night—that is it; you had better see to have your windows barred,” added Mr. Pennet, smiling. “In the darkness, I did not know what to make of it; for, of course, you may suppose, Penrose was the last man in my mind. What do you think now of his chances with Miss Troye? To be so caught in the fact! Fancy his position, poor fellow! I saw it all in a moment, and was full of compassion for him.”

“You think he came here on purpose, then?”

“Oh! not at all,” said Mr. Pennet, smiling; “how could I fancy anything so absurd as that.”

“That it was not then by accident he came?”

“Accident!”

“But, really, what do you suppose?”

“Oh, nothing; not of course that he was madly jealous of any one in this house. It would be so very difficult to suppose that: that one may see so far even without a candle, I presume,” added Mr. Pennet, calmly lighting his own, and going away presently with a glow of suppressed mirth illuminating his good-humoured handsome face.

## CHAPTER XXII.

## ON THE BALCONY.

THE Misses Wilmot, two second-rate belles of a third-rate town, had recently come on a visit to their aunt, Miss Fletcher, and out of compliment to her were invited to Everley; Miss Fletcher being a neighbour and old friend of Mrs. Bradel's. For the amusement of young ladies, however, as gentlemen are deemed indispensable, it was found necessary to invite Captain Seaton and others from Ormiston, and then ultimately more young ladies of the neighbourhood; so that almost without intending it, on the appointed evening there was quite a party at Everley, or at least such a number of young people as to make the proposition of an improvised dance in the back drawing-room generally and highly acceptable.

Miss Fletcher, fortunately also as renowned a musician as remarkable for good nature, cheerfully agreed to devote herself to the piano; so, amidst



much genuine mirth, the dancing commenced as soon as it was proposed, and continued with unabated spirit. The noisy enjoyment of the company atoned for the deficiency of numbers, and prevented the emptiness of the vast room from being noticed. So the party was voted a decided success; quite as agreeable as unceremonious arrangements of the sort are generally supposed, or, at least, said to be.

Yet underneath the surface of that enjoyment was considerable clashing of interest and of motives; a sustained action of secret influences, moving, indeed, in an under-tide, but not wanting therefore in proverbial depth. Many of the company had secret cause for grievous annoyance and vexation, and wore galling sackcloth suits under their holiday finery and smiling faces. Even Mr. Pennet himself, with all his suave exterior and courteous manners, was mentally ill at ease and much disturbed; for a skeleton came suddenly to sit with him at the board, and the ruby goblet at his lips was in consequence filled with bitterness. Caroline had come up from the lodge with her cousin, Mr. Roger Wade, and had introduced him to the house. He was the gentleman to whom the marriage of his cousin promised no less than possession of what Mr. Pennet had so long patiently coveted, and latterly almost regarded as his own—

presentation to Mocton preferment—he was besides personally in every way most likely to prove a formidable rival; being a young man of bland, insinuating manners, of perfect good breeding, and evidently quite disposed also to make the most of his opportunities.

Then Miss Fletcher herself—though labouring with complete devotion, and apparently with artless disengagement of mind at the piano—was harassed likewise by much private anxiety on her own account; for it was as derogatory to her mature experience as it was deeply hurtful to her feelings both as chaperon and as aunt, to perceive that Captain Seaton had never once asked either of her nieces to dance, when really there were the strongest apparent reasons for him to do so, as they were novelties and even pretty girls: and he was moreover an excellent match, had never seen them before, and would suit either of them admirably; so his avoidance was quite as unintelligible as it was provoking.

Mr. Slingsby indeed devoted himself with strict impartiality to either of the two Miss Wilmots; but as he held no marketable rank, his attentions were no sort of equivalent consolation whatever: quite the contrary, and by many a manifest collateral frown, Miss Fletcher endeavoured to curb his excessively

forward and confident advances. She was not indeed aware of the object of intense interest Captain Seaton had himself in the presence of Nora Troye: an interest that as a matter of course was excessively stimulated by her almost impertinent treatment of him during the entire evening; for his attentions were scarcely received by her with ordinary civility, and she persistently refused him for every successive dance.

Perhaps of all present, Caroline only appeared languid and out of spirits, and alone therefore appeared exactly as she sincerely felt. An unaccountable depression had been sometimes of late gaining on her, and often most irresistibly when there was least apparent ground for it: as certainly there was none on this evening. Edwin had danced with her; only once indeed, but then it would have been ridiculous to remain absolutely together all night, and so recommending her to enjoy herself freely, he had gone smiling away ostensibly, as he announced, to see what the Misses Wilmot were made of: it was the most natural thing in the world for him to do, yet occasionally afterwards Caroline's eyes might be surprised in anxious inquiry following his movements through the room.

What the Miss Wilmots were made of was a question that at a glance any one might easily resolve;

as rosy cheeks of nearly identical hue, shape, and texture, spotted muslin, and profusion of dimples, were obviously the leading composites both of Miss Wilmot and of Miss Lucy Anne Wilmot.

And if inclined to examine further, if curious about their intellectual endowments, one had but to sit awhile within hearing of their amiable prattle to be fully enlightened with equal certainty: suppose, during a pause in the dance, as they conversed on either side of Mrs. Bradel, replying to her absent questions concerning a late exhibition of pictures in town. They had a graceful, ingenuous way of talking at, and of themselves, that could not fail to captivate the listener.

"You mean the one of last summer, Mrs. Bradel; oh, yes, it was very nice indeed, a very nice exhibition."

"But we could not stop long enough, you know, because aunt Mary wanted to take Lucy to Scotland," replied Miss Wilmot. "That waltz is from the 'Traviata,' I am so fond of Verdi's music. But, dear me! what a dreadful time we stopped in the tunnel coming here; I was so very nervous, for I am naturally very nervous, and find it impossible to get over it."

"Yes, but they stopped much longer when first I

came down to the hunt ball," answered Lucy Anne, "It is not so long ago either, only two years ago; just after your return."

"Two years! Oh, dear! it must be, I'm sure."

"Well, the tunnel is not so long open, and one may see, for the date is marked on a stone at the station; and some one in the train observed it also, as we passed, but I forgot the figures the moment after. I wonder which is Captain Seaton's uniform, scarlet or blue—don't you like scarlet?"

"Do you mean for myself? Certainly not, unless it be modulated with white or black. You know my new scarf? Mamma calls it dingy, but I like it; I am so fond of quiet colours."

"Scarlet alone may be trying under most circumstances," added Mrs. Bradel, with a smile. "Caroline, I am sure, would think so."

The young ladies had but time to reply that "Miss Middleton, of course, might wear anything," when they severally stood up with the gentlemen who then advanced to claim the honour of their hands.

All through the evening, Nora had been remarkably composed and retiring. Her manner might at first glance appear to indicate depression of spirits; but, on closer scrutiny, it was evidently the calmness of pre-occupation rather than of dejection. If she took

every opportunity of refusing to dance, it was less from disinclination for the amusement itself than because it had not been offered to her in the most attractive form. If the right person had asked her, she would have liked nothing better. But, though the accident of position had frequently placed them together—though on every occasion he had been sufficiently agreeable and familiar—Edwin Bradel had not, for some unaccountable reason, even once asked her yet.

She had been sitting so long at last as to become quite remarkable, as well as wearied; moreover Edwin, after various moves in her direction, concluded by sinking on the sofa beside Caroline, in a state of lounging contentment that promised permanence and greatly diminished the chances of his standing up again for the evening. So her patience being exhausted, Nora ended by accepting the arm of Roger Wade, in not the very best of humours.

It was, no doubt, a *pis aller*; but not absolutely an entire sacrifice, as he was lithe, straight-limbed, of an exact height and obliging disposition, likely to show off her figure and performance to the best advantage, and answer all the recognized ends for which a male dancer was created. Very collected, therefore, considering the nervous distinction, Wade

swung her up and down the room with considerable success and excellent effect, holding his tongue the while with admirable discretion; for he saw that it was dancing and not talk was required of him, and he had come out to make himself agreeable. Sometimes Nora's dress brushed so close as actually to touch Edwin's feet as she circled round, and sometimes his attention was diverted from observing her by overhearing the lively conversation of Slingsby and his partner during the flitting pauses of the dance; for frequent were the opportunities good-naturedly offered of noting their mutual wit and good taste.

"Oh! vile," cried the lady, as Slingsby made an offer of some sparkling refreshment from the butler's tray: you will spoil my dress."

"At Sutton I am called the pink, Miss W."

"Pink, I presume, of perfection."

"Don't try compliments on me; I know you are a quiz, by your eyes."

"Isn't Captain Seaton very rich, and isn't his uncle a baronet?"

"Yes: moreover, his mother is a major."

"Fie! I shall sit down if you go on so. What a lovely waltz. Do you like Fanny Brown?"

Here they slid off into movement, after a few turns, to come back to the same place again.

"I like her," interjectionally.

"I am sure you like her very much."

"Indeed!"

"A dreadful girl who wears two shades of blue. I saw you dancing with her at Drake's."

"Only to vex Hudson Harvey."

"And who do you wish to provoke at present by dancing with me?"

"Yourself; merely by inflicting a disagreeable partner."

"What shall I reply to that?"

"Simper, and say I'm shocking."

They were off again, and as Edwin's eyes followed their movements, Nora's pale thoughtful features floated up to him. Wrapt in lofty calm, as if her mind were far away, and far above the passing scene, she came up in measured grace as it were upon the music; the intensity of her poetic beauty contrasting well with the vulgar comeliness, the dimples and smiles of happy Lucy Wilmot. She seemed all spirit then, and a noble mournfulness in the face, a sentiment of suppressed interior suffering akin to that "silent pain of the dark ladye," further interested, further idealized the expression. Swiftly she moved, but with such an evenness and grace of motion that the whispering only of her glossy silks was heard:



as now full into the light, then away like a passing shadow, she glided into the remoter shadows of the dusky room ; her figure mingling with its dim forms, and the large lustrous eyes growing more brilliant in the distance, lightened with a hard metallic glitter, like the jet bracelets on her wrist.


Sometimes Edwin surprised those eyes, caught from them a bright momentary gleam ; or sometimes, in a more lengthened meeting, was aware of a prolonged conscious look that certainly did not appear to shun detection : but this was chiefly when at the farther limits of the room ; for on coming nearer, they became calmly unconscious of his presence again. In consequence of this Edwin, by degrees, found the conversation with Caroline decline, and lose its interest then : indeed, for some time previously, since his observation had been diverted by the dancing, he had returned but careless and abstracted replies to her frequent leading interrogatories ; and when, at length, Nora stopped, out of breath and glowing, immediately in front of him, he rose promptly and invited her ; but he did so with an affected listlessness, in a deprecating, apologetic manner, which was a sort of compromise for apparent desertion of the sofa.

“ At last.”

Nora proved not so very exhausted as to refuse

him one turn at least, and with a thrill of pleasure she withdrew her arm from Mr. Wade, who was far too well bred not to be delighted to give way, or do anything else his superiors required. Caroline, perhaps, moved as gracefully, and as lightly; but she did not dance like Nora; for a ductility of movement, an insinuating suppleness of the "lissome" form was a peculiar fascination of the latter: a yielding something, which opposed a little even when least palpable, and which was felt only when music and feelings blended, as they did now, in harmonious unity. It was an art with her. Nora danced with expression, as she did everything else when her heart was in it.

When they commenced to dance, Edwin had a frequent smile or look in passing Caroline; many other objects of interest in the room besides challenged his attention. It was above all amusing to notice the envy in Seaton's face, and feel his hungry eyes fixed upon himself. But gradually his own deepening sensations, and the growing interest in his partner, became wholly engrossing; as the movement and the music affected him, the spirit of pleasure awakened and filtered through him like an essence, until he became careless of even further observing Caroline; and as the dancing continued without pause, his enjoyment became plainly evident in his glowing



countenance. This Caroline might easily have noticed ; but probably did not, as Mr. Pennet accidentally came to sit by her on the sofa, and had so much to say, that her attention was necessarily diverted.

When Nora and her partner rested at length, nothing whatever remarkable had occurred in the room. Other couples continued to enjoy the waltz; indifferent common-places buzzed around, and with a tired expression in his languid eyes Captain Seaton, very pale, was hanging dejectedly over a music-book in a distant corner. Yet something confused and wild whirling in Edwin's brain, made it feel most strange to see everything as usual then. He endeavoured to converse with Nora in their ordinary manner, but could not find a sustained or interesting topic. She was evidently as disinclined or as incapable of conversation, for the arm which he supported hung languidly, and presently she complained of the excessive heat ; he, therefore, ordered the end window to be thrown up, and, by a tacitly mutual consent, they together passed out upon the balcony.

The moon was wanting ; but the heavens were a vault of deep blue enamel, richly warmed by a liquid starlight. It was softer, fresher, scarcely cooler, than in the room ; and an odorous incense of honeysuckle

and thyme steamed upward from the perfumed beds underneath, as Edwin leant upon the rail of the balcony, looking down the park over the dark crowding masses of bosky foliage. Just opposite them, through a break in the chesnuts, a single star attracted his notice—a large lucid star, so intensified in colour by the surrounding blackness of the cold shadowy boughs, that it burned bright and red, and seemed as positive as a beacon light. Presently he drew her attention also to it; but Nora, turning aside indifferently, and with a sigh sat down upon the balcony.

“I have nothing to do with stars,” she said: “they are emblems of hope; and for those without hope, as I am, even the bright heavens themselves are dull and silent.”

The sigh was repeated more plainly, and by the tinted light stealing behind through the silken hangings, he also noticed her heaving bosom; he was quick to be touched at the moment, for his own impressions were in harmonious accord; and her soft and plaintive voice, her matchless beauty, sincerely enlisted his sympathies: he felt vaguely for her.

“Are you indeed so unhappy?” Something smothered up further utterance on his lips. Too consciously vivid a sense of interest, perhaps a dread

of yielding to such dangerous, overpowering compassion, checked the words for a moment; and abruptly turning, he looked again over the sloping lawn, now no longer calm, for the influences of the moment, during the pause, quickly gathered in upon him closer.

At length yielding, and yielding with a definite sense of culpability, he bent low, very low, near her, and said—said, no matter what; any common-place was enough. It was the hesitating tone, the eager manner, which addressed her, not the words.

“I never remember a more agreeable waltz. How comes it we never danced together before?”

“I don’t know, Mr. Bradel.” And with the murmured reply, a soft flame stole upward from those eyes, where brilliancy now melted into a liquid, dangerous depth. The sigh which accompanied was also genuine and irresistible; for many things at the moment combined to affect Nora, and she was truly moved. Edwin, ever kind to her, had for the past days been more than courteous and attentive, so that gratitude and friendliness, if no tenderer feelings, were but natural.

But a bitter fancy also returned to move her; one which, even if ill-grounded, had occasionally sufficed before to disturb the too nicely balanced serenity of

her mind: it was a regret for an assumed possibility; grief that her return from school had not been hastened. For it was cruel to believe that such a trifling cause as mere accidental delay should have had such important effect; that the space of a few months only should make all the difference, and cause such a permanently unhappy deviation in the whole destiny of her life.

As these thoughts chased rapidly through her mind Edwin meanwhile stood silently opposite that fixed watchful star. It was neither the interest nor the beauty of the night, nor the floating melody of the music from inside, which engaged him; still less was it anything precisely allied to the operation of thought. He was merely pausing on the brink of guiltiest compliance; for that same voice and look had met him once before in the drawing-room of Middleton Lodge, and now identical and as immediate results followed from it.\* The remainder of his prudence quickly dissolved before the heated pulse of flaming passion it awakened.

He moved close to her again—closer still, and was actually about to speak, when momentary sounds of laughter from the window behind checked him; then a shadow came, as if some one stood intercepting the light from the room, or was about to enter the

balcony. But presently the shadow passed again; the voices died away. Then he spoke, or at least would have done so, if extreme surprise had not checked him suddenly.

"Miss Troye, Miss Troye!" he repeated, then bending nearer towards her averted face. "What is the matter? what have I done? what has happened?" he added in a breath, with excessive warmth, perceiving that Nora was in floods of tears.

"Nothing! I have received nothing indeed from you but kindness—genuine kindness. Forgive me if I cannot restrain myself; for I am so wretched—so very wretched," and she leant again upon the railing and wept continuously.

"If I can do anything, trust me. Only confide in me as a friend. Is there anything in my power? Is there anything I may do for you?" he asked in a whirl of extreme confusion and surprise.

"It is wrong of me; you should not witness this: you will forgive, you will forget it," she said. "But when my feelings break out I cannot help them, and you are the last person who should see me thus affected. But you will not remember, nor speak of it," she added eagerly; "I trust to your kindness, to your compassion, to your honour for that."

"Say if I may do anything for you: I cannot

bear to see you unhappy, Miss Troye, indeed I cannot."

"You are so good; but go away now—go away at once: it is better you should leave me at once: better for both of us. I cannot recover while you are there. And you will go; you are so considerate and kind. Out of pity, out of good nature, I ask you to leave me!"

A moment afterwards Mr. Pannet's head looked for an instant from the window draperies behind, and withdrew again almost as quickly as the passing gleam faded from his handsome features; while he slid his hand absently across his shining auburn curls, and still remained standing a few paces from the window, inside of the room.

It would be so excessively inconvenient if one less discreet were to pass on the balcony just then, that merely as friend to Edwin he should endeavour to prevent it. And well, indeed, it was that he remained there; for Captain Seaton at length crossed the room towards the window. It was plain for what purpose, and where he would certainly have gone to, if Mr. Pannet had not skilfully contrived to arrest his progress by a series of voluble and important remarks of irresistible interest: "the strength of the dépôt battalion, the latest regulations,



and likelihood of orders for India, his own expressed inclination for an Indian chaplaincy, even the price of the horse he had to sell ;” and when at length every topic, local, civil, and military, was exhausted, and his companion began finally to move, even then Mr. Pennet had still something to say in a very loud tone, and while yet speaking passed out first on the balcony himself.

No matter what was interrupted, Captain Seaton could not possibly have observed anything suspicious, as Nora was found upon the seat, agitating her fan a little violently indeed, considering the freshness of the night ; while Bradel, with striking carelessness, had his back turned, gazing listlessly at the same star again. They were so carefully placed away from the range of light that whatever evidences of trepidation their faces might have afforded could not possibly be noticed.

“Come ! supper is announced,” Mr. Pennet said, then offering his arm to Nora ; thus enabling her to re-enter the room in the easiest manner : shortly afterwards Bradel and Seaton followed, talking with careless cheerfulness. Therefore, considering all the circumstances and the difficulty of the case, the entry was well and creditably achieved. But the first thing Edwin met on crossing the window was a strange,

nervous kind of look from Caroline, who stood up to receive him. He did not, however, dwell upon that expression, nor either go near her just then ; as Miss Lucy Wilmot was fortunately next him, he gave her his arm down to supper.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

## MERITS CANVASSED.

WE are so prone to exaggerate the effect of our actions, and to over-estimate our own importance in the world, that Luke at first tormented himself very successfully as to the amount of sensation his adventure of the window might be likely to create and the misunderstanding it might receive; especially from Nora, who was sure to misinterpret the act and hate him for it: it must at all events, he was sure, expose the secret of his life, and furnish a fund of sarcasm at his cost. It might, however, have been something hurtful to his vanity to learn what little noise it really did make, and how very few thought or cared anything about it: the world had its own daily business to mind, and Luke was far too insignificant a personage to engage its busy attention. So after merely being once or twice repeated as a tolerably good story, the matter was quietly passed over and forgotten; particularly as other topics arose at the time

of extreme social interest further to curtail its existence—topics affording much room for gossiping surmise and exciting conjecture.

For it was at first vaguely rumoured, and then established beyond any question or doubt, however various the manifold additions grafted on the main fact might have been, that a fracas of some serious sort had recently occurred at Everley Hall—a violent misunderstanding, or even downright quarrel between the heads of each house, on questions arising out of forms connected with the projected marriage; a quarrel which was sufficiently serious, some asserted, to oblige Edwin, who appeared to take an opposite side from his father, to quit Everley and reside permanently at the club. An act so decided as this, necessarily gave rise to a world of talk in the town; and accordingly, amidst a variety of surmises, it was alleged that Mr. Middleton's proposals of settlement on his daughter were not such as Mr. Bradel affirmed he had been led all along to expect, and that their mutual views on the subject were urged with a warmth which rather widened the difference, and ultimately led each party to retire, leaving things unsettled.

“It was simply monstrous of a man like Middleton to think of putting off his daughter with only a

thousand pounds," Miss Fletcher said to her friend Mrs. Drake. "What did the old miser mean to do with his money? Making a match, too, fit for a princess! no wonder that Mr. Bradel felt it; for Mr. Bradel, whatever they said, was a gentleman every inch, and it was not so much the money as the meanness of it that touched him. Middleton is such a Jew that from the moment he saw the son bent on the match, his only thought was to get out of it cheaply; and his wife is just as bad, perhaps the worst of the two: very likely indeed that the shabbiness is all on her side, as her grandfather was a ship-chandler down at the port, and good blood never yet took kindly to money-getting; while the Middletons, since time immemorial, have been gentle both by lineage and kin."

"But some say the Bradels are altogether to blame in the business," replied Mrs. Drake, "and I have heard it said that, considering his present condition, Middleton's offer was reasonable enough. It appears his farming engagements are now on a scale to absorb all his money, and that, consequently, without great sacrifice, he could not immediately withdraw a large sum; so instead, he proposed an annuity chargeable on his property—a far better thing, every one agrees, and you know what an

estate it is. But Mr. Bradel unaccountably stands out for money, absolutely for money, as if merely to put difficulties in the way ; it is asserted even that such is his only object, and that he is not half as well pleased, nor was he from the beginning as satisfied with the affair as he pretended. Now considering the kind of man he is, how high he always carried his head, that does not seem so unlikely ; although for my part, the Middletons are good enough in every way, and, as you say, they were always gentlemen ; while every one knows where the Bradels came from."

"True ; but the Bradels hold a high rank at present, and may look to any alliance : besides, there is something in present rank."

"Doubtless ; but as by wealth alone such rank was attained, it follows that if the Middletons be also rich, the match is equal."

"Even so : nevertheless, if equally wealthy, the families are not of the same footing in the county ; *that* you must allow : they don't both visit at Delamere, for instance."

"A point directly, I maintained, in favour of the Lodge people. The Bradels may hold actually a higher place because they worked harder for it ; there was need for them to push, and they have

always been pushing, from father to son; while the Middletons are now where they always were, holding their own position easily, because entitled to it; and if to-morrow both families were to become poor, the Middletons would scarcely fall lower, while the Bradels must disappear altogether. That is ever the difference between your parvenu and a true gentleman."

"A true gentleman—Jacob Middleton a true gentleman!—you have settled it now. However, it is certain a coldness does exist between the families, for even Mr. Pennet admits as much."

"I heard not: they say at Madame Taille's that he denies it positively, and it isn't likely he would admit it—Mr. Pennet is so very cautious."

"Well, I am certain of it, for I never saw a woman so changed latterly as Mrs. Middleton. Depend, there is something on her mind, and she will never be easy until she has him tied and safe; and I wish indeed she had, poor woman. I saw Nora Troye driving with Mrs. Bradel, yesterday: how well she is looking!"

"Yes, I wonder how she became so intimate there, and especially as one never sees Jane with her: isn't it odd? Though Jane is such a stay at home, that may be accounted for. Still I don't think it an ad-

vantage to be ever seen with people who, as it were, appear not to recognize her family: I know it is not so in this instance, for Mrs. Bradel visits at the Cottage; only it has that appearance. It may be a romantic notion of mine, but I don't think it quite respectable: there is too much of patronage in it. Just because a girl happens to be lively or pretty, to lift her out of her family is not respectable; it is not at all events to my taste, and anything but fair to her either. I should feel quite ashamed if any mere acquaintance, like Mrs. Bradel, were to become suddenly attached to my Kate, and take her away from her home: I should feel it anything but a compliment, I promise you."

"My dear, they are out of their senses at it; and Mrs. Troye does nothing but talk the Bradels at you from morning till night: Nora this, Nora that; and Mrs. Bradel says 'tis disgusting. But what can you expect from a vulgar woman like Mrs. Troye? though Jane certainly ought to know better. However, there is an excuse for it; an excellent reason for getting her anywhere away from home at present: an entanglement, or some such sort of school-girl affair with young Penrose, I believe, that they want to put an end to. Mrs. Darrel told me all about it the other day; and very likely it is Jane's reason for leav-



ing her so much at Everley, which I should think would be the fittest place to get nonsense of that sort quickly out of one's head : and no doubt Jane thinks so likewise."

"Do you know that young Penrose will not be such a bad match at all; as Mr. Lumney, they say, intends doing something for him, and my girls like him very well besides : he is an agreeable young man, and his father was a gentleman. Though indeed 'twould be an unsuitable thing for Nora Troye—unfortunate for both of them."

"Unsuitable, do you say, my dear ! Nora Troye is really a pretty girl, and ought to do remarkably well ; why should they throw her away ? Then as to Mr. Lumney's doing for the young man ——"

Miss Fletcher leant back in her chair and threw up her hands, at the absurd notion of Mr. Lumney ever doing anything, either for himself or for anybody else.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

## AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

LUKE thoroughly applied the discipline of hard work to his mind, in the hope of forcing it thereby from the now painful consideration of the subject dearest to him; as it was all important to his peace to stifle that source of anxiety, for a season at least. But though his efforts to this end were certainly sincere and consistent, his success therein was indifferent in the extreme. To give up thinking of what hitherto had been the great interest of his life, simply on the inference that all chance of it was henceforth lost, was not easy; to give it up only because the best and freshest sympathies of his nature had been squandered on a venture which seemed to promise no adequate return, was not logical. His will was divided against itself in the effort, and the effort on trial proved beyond his compass. Besides, those late rumours concerning the Bradels interested and disturbed him further: connected in his mind as Nora

was now with the family, everything regarding it was of importance to him. So between an irresistible desire to ascertain the exact truth concerning these reports, and a firm resolution of not wilfully indulging any reflections or speculations at all relating to his cousin, he was sometimes in the extremest perplexity.

One day of leisure he resolutely decided to cut this Gordian knot, by at once going out to talk freely with Jane upon the matter. She was his friend, the safest person he knew of; there had not been anything of the nature of confidence between them now for a considerable time, and as Nora he presumed to be still at Everley, there was every likelihood of having Jane uninterrupted and alone.

Passing through the town on his way to the Cottage, with this intention, Luke had occasion to call at a shop, at the door of which he accidentally encountered Caroline Middleton. It was impossible, as it proved, to pass without speaking to her ~~then~~; as the door of the shop was at the moment blocked up by passers, and she was waiting for her mother, engaged on business inside. The few words, however, which first passed lengthened insensibly to a prolonged conversation; for they were ~~then~~ nearly in the same position, in the same unacknowledged state of dis-

satisfaction and trial, perfectly prepared to coincide unconsciously with each other's mood, and therefore to like each other: a sympathy of suffering united them, and accordingly the impression which the meeting left on the mind of each was identical, and mutually favourable. Caroline noticed the subdued, interesting expression of Luke's face, and he was filled with a vague, deep compassion for her; a compassion grounded on the rumoured rupture with the Bradels, of which he supposed her to be the victim.

The interview was in every way of opposite character from that which took place at the opening of our tale; both were then exalted with the budding pride of life; a pride positively expressed in direct scorn of their mutual pretensions. It was not so long ago; but each had, meanwhile, been taught in different degrees and in different ways something of the same lesson, had acquired some practical experience since of how far the performance of life agreed with its fair promises. Caroline truly had no reason yet to mistrust the full measure of extreme happiness her destiny seemed to pledge. Only the shadow of a dark wing had crossed over her and left a passing blight behind it; a vapour had breathed upon the mirror, and her nervous fancy at once saw all things dimly and confused; for if an unforeseen difficulty

had come at the last moment to disturb, how be sure that some other unforeseen difficulties might not even yet arise to destroy altogether? Oh! she was not sure, perhaps, because her nature was itself deficient in self-reliance and hope. She had vague presentiments of extreme contingencies, equal in their effect upon herself, though not in themselves as strong and certain, as the grinding conviction which already foreran in Luke's mind the impending utter destruction of all his youthful hopes.

There had been a slight frost in the morning, and for the season it was cold, so their concluding conversation had been chiefly concerning the weather. But in how many ways one may talk of the weather: under circumstances, it may become the most interesting topic; and it certainly was not a tiresome one to Luke, who when he ended by ascribing the increased cold to the effect of a thaw, little suspected what an unintentional blow he thereby dealt Caroline.

"It must be so," he repeated, taking leave of her with a kindly smile: "it must be so, for there is nothing so cold as a thaw."

"Nothing so cold as a thaw." The words struck with icy weight on Caroline: her mind retained them afterwards with pain. How cruelly apt, how bitterly suggestive, the cold consciousness of change

which had of late crept upon her : of change in another quarter, change in another sort of temperature. This, far more than the vexation arising from mere obvious and material difficulties, was the secret of the chill presentiment which was beginning so rapidly to freeze up the very fountain of her spirits.

But Luke went heedlessly on his way, glowing with kindly feelings towards her whom he had just furnished with a text for bitterest reflection. It was, perhaps, the first entirely civil interview which had ever occurred between them, and the gracious feeling it called forth on his side was all the more vivid and impassioned for its novelty. He had hitherto considered Caroline Middleton as pretentious and conceited, but at once he saw his mistake now ; she was truly a simple, graceful, and exceedingly pretty girl ; entirely different from Nora, indeed : yes, entirely ; and with a sigh he thought how much better it would be if the difference were something less ; if Nora could borrow a share of her winning tenderness and simplicity. Hence it naturally became as plain as possible to Luke now that Edwin Bradel was in great luck, and that Caroline was vastly too good for so entirely worthless an individual ; but, since she was satisfied with the affair, he decided that it was as cruel as it was absurd on the face of it, that mere

money differences should keep people so wealthy asunder. He diversified the way on to the Cottage by alternately lamenting the actually forlorn prospects of his own affection, by praising Caroline, and by muttering on her account many a secret and half expressed anathema, alike against old Bradel and old Middleton, with perfect impartiality.

Age errs so perversely in its dealings with youth, that instead of accepting the honourable and highly complimentary character of utter self-negation assigned to it by the latter, it is ever greedily covetous : eager to prolong and retain, and pitifully reluctant to make way and yield in turn. The blissful inexperience of youth cannot understand that the office of coming years is surely to move farther away, instead of bringing nearer, the seemingly ever imminent happiness which we all pursue from the cradle to the grave ; and which escapes but more rapidly, as the span shortens and the cold night draws on, when no man may further enjoy.

Determined still more, if only out of this newly awakened interest in Caroline, to ascertain every possible detail concerning the rupture at Everley, Luke arrived at the Cottage and pulled the bell.

The door opened, and Nora stood before him. Each had come with the same object, for each had ex-

pected to meet Jane, and each had also the same private reasons for mutual avoidance just then; yet there they were standing face to face—they were face to face.

Luke spoke first, but awkwardly, and with much hesitation.

“Good-morrow! when did you return? I did not expect to see you back so soon. Can you say if Jane be at home? I have business with her?”

“Jane is not at home at present,” replied Nora, without opening the door wider.

“Pray! when may I see her?”

“I can’t say.”

“Where has she gone to?”

“I don’t know; perhaps if you came into the house and waited, she will soon return.”

“Thank you, I prefer not.”

“Please yourself then,” and turning into the hall she left him there. He saw her dress round the turn of the staircase, and heard her on the lobby overhead. Presently a door closed, and the sound of her footsteps ceased altogether.

Luke left the porch, intending to go away on the very instant; but as he passed down the garden his mind changed: it would not do to let her suppose she had power to retain or to dismiss him at will;



that her mood or temper was of the least consequence to him. If he did go, it should be when it suited himself only, at his own leisure and convenience. It would compromise his dignity to leave with indecent haste, as if he were ashamed to meet her; and he was not: he had no cause for shame whatever.

So he went up one of the side walks of the garden, and became busy with the flowers and standard shrubs before the house; passing from one bed to another with a loitering careless gait, which must, he flattered himself (if any one were watching overhead), have had a fine effect, and convinced such a one that he was perfectly at his ease and wholly unconcerned.

In this way a considerable time went by; until the fat lap-dog Dido came wriggling up the walk, furnishing Luke with a further opportunity of showing how perfectly disengaged his mind was; for he had leisure to notice the dog, and moreover to put it through an entire course of long neglected performances, apparently with much enjoyment and interest. This happened quite close to the house; and while so engaged with the dog, making it stand up, balance a pebble, &c., there came a step in the porch, and Nora passed out, carrying a bird-cage.

Knowledge or thought of Luke was apparently farthest from her mind, for she gave a little start on

perceiving him, and then passed on with the most unconcerned expression, though she passed quite close to him. She was only going to hang her canary in the sun, and went slowly along by the row of windows, evidently looking out a suitable nail for the purpose. Presently she found one, but on trial it proved out of reach; so setting down the cage she retraced her steps for a garden stool at the end of the walk: but even with the stool it would not do, so she set down the cage again, and stood looking puzzled at the nail.

"Perhaps," said Luke then—he had his back turned, hitherto not pretending to notice—"perhaps—that is, if you want to hang that cage upon that nail—perhaps you would let me do it for you?"

"If you think it would not be too much trouble, perhaps you would try, then."

Luke got upon the stool, but found it accidentally placed so much aside of the nail, that though tall enough he could not quite reach it. Getting down to alter its position, Nora stopped him.

"Put your foot on the window-stool," she said, looking into his eyes. "Do! you are smart at climbing window-stools, and this time Mr. Pennet will not catch you."

As Luke stood looking at her with the cage in his hand, she burst out laughing.

"Oh, Luke! Luke! Luke! what a fine position you placed yourself in that night!"

He got off the stool, and put the cage deliberately on the ground.

"Do you know, Nora, what it was I wanted at Everley that night?"

"To see me, of course: and the object itself was not blameable; though you might have compassed it, I presume, without making yourself as well as me ridiculous."

"You are mistaken, then: it could not have been only to see you," he answered quickly; "I had been watching you for hours that evening, and, believe me, had soon seen quite enough of you."

"Then *what* did you want there? I was never more provoked, vexed and amused all together. First for the shame of it, because you were my cousin; then because it was such a joke to see you white as a sheet caught in the fact, looking so frightened and silly. On the whole, however, it was paying too dear for a laugh, and it turned out excessively annoying; so the next time you choose to take leave of your senses, I must decidedly beg that you won't compromise me. It was not fair: if you had

considered my feelings in any degree, you could not have done it."

"If you had ever considered mine, Nora, it might have been better for both of us now," answered Luke, gravely; "but in truth you were not bound to it: if I trusted all to you without secrecy, placed all my future on a cast, and lost the venture; if I loved you with an energy of passion that exalted you to an impossible degree, that enriched you with every noble quality of the highest natures, it was surely my own fault: and, as I deserve, I expiate it bitterly at present. For there is a greater pain than to lose the only object of one's life, Nora—it is to feel such loss to be a gain, as I do at present: to find that what one has followed, exclusively, eagerly followed, is not worth the having at last; to see one like you, so gifted and superior, with a mind like yours fitted to choose a vocation, and achieve a noble end in life—to see such decline to the falsest tastes, to the meanest things of the world, descend not only to the track of its vulgar level, but even beneath it; for when high natures fall they degrade utterly, as you are doing: that is, indeed, intolerable when one has loved you, as unhappily I did.

"My affection was too easily won, perhaps too poor a prize," he continued; "therefore I will not

urge anything on that score. But for your own sake, and for *that* only, do not let me believe that I at present understand your motives; that you will bring such ruin upon yourself as to allow so detestable a suspicion to retain even a momentary existence. It is not necessary to allude to it more plainly, as I see by your colour that I am perfectly understood; let me be satisfied, therefore, that I have lost the only object of my life, without forcing me also to blush for having ever coveted it. I had no thought of you which was not pure; leave me at least in recompence an unstained remembrance: let me think the past was nothing worse than wasted time, that the idol of my foolish dreams was not utterly so base and unworthy. Think! that it is all I ask of you: only think! Use your own reason and conscience, exercise only the lowest standard of common morality, and it will be enough to save you: at least I hope it will, for I cannot see what other chance remains."


Without another word Luke turned down the walk, and left Nora standing there.

## CHAPTER XXV.

## VAGUE CONJECTURINGS.

ALMOST daily rumours and surmises were current now concerning the Bradels; at one time it was a misunderstanding, causing indefinite postponement of the marriage; at another, the ceremony was announced for immediate consummation. Nevertheless, beyond that Edwin had suddenly quitted home and resided now permanently at the club, nothing whatever in the shape of fact was positively ascertained: even the best intentioned could not advance beyond conjecture as to the cause of his departure. And, also, though Mr. Pennet was noticed to be decidedly out of spirits, equal uncertainty as to the cause of his depression prevailed.

Slingsby was of opinion that as Mr. Pennet looked as if going to be hanged, it was proof positive he was also going to be married (indeed rumour had before coupled his name with Nora Troye), and assured his friend, Captain Seaton, one day as they rode together



down to the port, that many of their mutual friends seemed at present engaged in the most complicated course of cross purposes. "For instance," he added, "there is Bradel going to be married on the twelfth; I had it from unquestionable authority, and here you know nothing about it—are not even invited: you who are such friends. How do you explain the omission? Moreover, the affair should have a special interest for you, as, I presume, a certain lady of our acquaintance may be among the bridesmaids."

"On the twelfth? I scarcely believe that. It was not intended having it so soon, I understood; and I dare say it will be quite private," was the reply, in a formal tone, intended to check further discussion of the subject.

But Slingsby was not to be checked.

"The Middletons are hastening it on," he added, "as they want to make sure of him. 'Tis to be done, done quickly, and, if quickly, will be well done for them. But ever so hurried or private, I cannot see why they left you out; even if not Bradel's friend, it would have been only mere humanity to have asked you, for the reason just mentioned."

"I have not seen Bradel of late, and know nothing of him," answered Captain Seaton, sharply.

"Naturally! When a man marries he prunes his

acquaintance, makes a holocaust of his friends at the shrine of his affection: 'tis an initiatory ceremony, an excuse for bringing the intimacy of years to an untimely end, and the only advantage of the institution that I can see."

"Mr. Pennet, I dare say, will officiate then?" in awhile asked Seaton, again encouraging the topic inadvertently.

"Mr. Pennet, I dare say, will. You know the man?"

"Not in the least, and have as little desire."

"Two cherries on the one stem, I perceive," said Slingsby, laughing. "Just as I suspected; but, in your place, I would not have crossed him—not openly. You are but a fashionable soldier, and he a very artful parson—the odds were terribly against you."

"I never had any sort of intercourse with the gentleman."

"Rouge against noir, I need scarcely tell you, has no chance whatever," continued Slingsby, not heeding. "Your soldiering in itself is not bad: rouge is a pretty colour; with its swaggering long sword and plumes it will answer in proper season, during times of mirth and festivity, while the dance and music last. But afterwards, when supper is over and the lights out, then the bel air, the swagger, the plumes,



and the prestige, go out too, like the snuff of the extinguished chandelier; the hero dwindles speedily to a spendthrift sub, who, when noir drops in sleek and reputable next morning, will be altogether forgotten. The advantages of that colour must distance everything, and does daily. My poor mother in her wisdom wanted me to enter the Church, and I have lived bitterly to appreciate her advice. If only a tolerably good-looking curate, I'll back him against a General of Division where a lady is to be won."

"Has Pennet indeed the influence with the Bradels that he pretends—that people give him?"

"Of course. He is not the man to neglect the chances of his position, the duties and emoluments of his craft. They say but for him an open rupture must have occurred this last time at Everley: and more is the pity it did not; we should have had something to talk about: though people talk all the same, and say, if the marriage were not to be at once, and if it were not at present wholly impossible, that the Bradels would be well pleased even yet to have all intercourse with the Middletons at an end."

"Considering the quickness of Ormiston tongues, that is not saying so much, after all," answered Seaton. "But here we are at the Ferry Point."

And the road, as he spoke, broke from the line of enclosures which had hitherto shut in the view on either side, and opened on the wide beach. At once the full breadth of the river lay in expanse before them.

"The principal yachts are laid up since the first," added Slingsby, as they continued their ride in the direction of the port, "for the club finished early this year: and so much the better; yachting is a folly I could never quite understand; and besides, sometimes, in late years, becomes a serious nuisance by breaking into the hunting season."

"That, however, is the *Lesbia*," continued Slingsby, as on rounding the next headland, both gentlemen were attracted by a large cutter standing across the river, and both also recognized her at once. "Bradel keeps her still afloat, though he has not been on board half-a-dozen times since the spring. With plenty of money, one must do something; so that boat costs him at least ten pounds a-week to keep up, and all for the glory of it. But it is like him: just his way. In trifles, he pares as close to the rind as any one, and then takes fits of squandering by the handful; as for instance the present he made to Pennet the other day. You know the cob, Hawker's cob: a stump-legged, cat-hammed beauty, clean as a billiard ball,

the very one he bought last Mocton Fair; a picture of the real old English hack, and worth a hundred a-year if only to look at. Well, he has just given him to Pennet—the greatest sacrifice I ever knew of: fancy, to Pennet, who does not know a curb from a crupper! might as well have put him to a gig at once. But, 'tis all luck: parson's luck; and it would not surprise me much either were he to get that little Troye in the end also: not that, in my opinion, it would be any great catch; though, with all faults, she has some good points—fine eyes certainly: if a man looks to eyes, I don't know where he might find better, and she is besides as brisk as a racket-ball. Some men like racket-balls, though I don't, and possession of this prize is a happiness I'd wish for you or Pennet rather than for myself. Apropos, you remember the cousin of whom you were at one time so jealous—cousin Penrose? Well, she has thrown him, I understand, and thrown him badly: scratched, altogether; walked off the course, and disqualified. They say, also, that if entered in time, she'd have probably posted the Middletons, and made a good run for the Everley Stakes; though that is not likely."

So the pair continued their ride, mixing facts and falsehood together, speculating on topics of which they had knowledge, as on those of which they had

none whatever; discussing, amongst the latter, the possible effect and merits of the recent disturbance at Everley Hall: a subject on which they, equally with the public of Ormiston, were at this time profoundly ignorant.

the very one he bought last Mocton F. of the real old English hack, and a-year if only to look at. Well, him to Pennet—the greatest sacrifice, to Pennet, who does not crupper! might as well have once. But, 'tis all luck: it does not surprise me much if a little Troye in the end it would be any great she has some good man looks to eyes, better, and she is. Some men like session of this Pennet rather her the co jealous—c him, I u would no longer remain an excuse fo altogeth visits to Everley, and that in itself wa They at point; for in many ways, it was plain prob had not derived entire benefit from that inti for But even so it was scarcely her fault; at her there were so many temptations to err, that Jane f as very rigorous in defending the character of her sister, even from an occasional assault of her own

## CHAPTER XXVI.

## A MYSTERIOUS CIRCUMSTANCE.

OF all not directly concerned, Jane Troye was most pleased that Caroline's marriage should approach at last: on her friend's account principally, as also for other reasons more intimately important to her own private happiness; for she had decided—this marriage once over—that things would henceforth certainly take a more orderly and comfortable aspect at home. Nora would soberly re-enter the line of her duties then, and resume the routine of ordinary life, out of which she had been awhile dazzled and so unhappily disturbed. There would no longer remain an excuse for those frequent visits to Everley, and that in itself was an important point; for in many ways, it was plain, that she had not derived entire benefit from that intimacy. But even so it was scarcely her fault; at her age there were so many temptations to err, that Jane was very rigorous in defending the character of her sister, even from an occasional assault of her own

partial judgment ; and if ever she appeared inferior to the standard that earlier anticipations had raised her to, it was only because some momentary perverse influence, or pernicious circumstance, for awhile obscured her true nature. An excusable irregularity of youth, the capriciousness incidental to ardent temperaments, or, more agreeably, it was alone the flattery and folly of the world which had spoiled her : the adulation she universally received was indeed itself enough to set astray a person of a far wiser and a colder disposition.

After Caroline's marriage, therefore, Jane decided that everything would naturally right itself again, and resettle into its own regular channel. It was not necessary to probe the matter very deeply, as the marriage, so immediate now, would itself speedily resolve the question : accordingly, without exactly examining what the grounds for this assumption were, she accepted it with perfect reliance.

But the proverbial darkness of the hour before dawn was illustrated in this case with unfortunate exactitude. As if a forerunner of the happy change which Jane anticipated, Nora's behaviour became at the moment colder, more reserved, more unsisterly than ever. Since her last return from Everley, not only was there a greater withdrawal of confidence,

but many signs of a radical change of character, as obvious as they were alarming and unintelligible, were observed. Nora was quieter at home, in appearance much improved, therefore in this there was a marked and pleasing change; she was more patient, more enduring: but it was the sullen calm of resolution rather than of chastened submission. For as if steadily pursuing some pre-determined course, which no effect of circumstances should be allowed to divert, she suffered the most opposite changes of domestic temperature with an endurance sometimes approaching to fortitude: the most exasperating interference on the part of her mother, or the warmest, most sincere demonstrations of affection from Jane, alike encountered the same mechanical and unalterable repose. This behaviour, as evidently opposed to her habits as to her natural character, soon gave Jane just ground for anxiety. Even the old outbreaks of temper were themselves far preferable to such a studied reticence; as they were at least from the heart out, and genuine. But a course of action so clearly pre-arranged, and pursued with such a formal consistency, could only proceed from some lurking and deep-seated motive, of which Jane was altogether ignorant. Indeed, many casual circumstances occurred at this time



which also seemed quite unaccountable. First, her mysterious silence concerning the disturbance at Everley was at the least unkind; as Jane's intimacy and interest in Caroline gave her first right and qualification to the fullest information regarding her: yet Nora could not be induced to talk openly about it, and on various other points her reserve was to the full as inexplicable. Immediately after her return, one circumstance particularly occurred, which above all perplexed Jane, and gave her much cause for anxiety—it was on an occasion when endeavouring to bring Nora to disclose further details of the notorious disagreement at Everley.

“And you say, that without any explanation, Mrs. Bradel entered in tears to say that you had all better leave the house?” asked Jane: “how very mysterious!”

“Yes! that we should leave at once.” (The conversation took place in Nora's room while she arranged her dress after a walk.) “It was a disappointment to me in one way, for Mr. Pennet was trying over the new duet, and we were beginning to understand something about it,” added Nora, lightly, running off then into a laughing description of Mr. Pennet's attempts in a musical direction—of their improvised concert—of Miss Wilmot's contralto;

all in a light showy way, as if forcing for effect. It gave Jane a singularly disagreeable impression at the moment, for the tone of her sister's mirth was often now false and unpleasant; and she sat by in silence, while Nora continued, half talking, sometimes half singing to herself, to arrange her toilet. The strange sense of constraint growing between the sisters made it latterly often feel awkward, as it did now, to be without some semblance of occupation when thus alone together; and in a while, when conversation was exhausted, Nora began to sing aloud to pass the silence and dispel this feeling, busy with her things the while, and sometimes breaking off abruptly to continue the conversation—

“The purple peaches on the wall, the golden leaves among,  
All thro’ the lazy noontide lay a-kissing in the sun.”

At all events, it served to settle the question of those vexatious charades once for all; so that much good came of it. She interrupted laughing—

“And winged gnats sang in the air, while painted garden bees—”

“Was it Mr. Bradel’s doing?” asked Jane, at last.

“Very likely. How that song runs in my brain—”

“Hung in the warm lavender, or droned adown the breeze;  
When low upon the ground I sat, the garden wicket near,  
For the creaking of its rusty hinge I only longed to hear.”

"How very strange. I wonder Caroline does not tell me something about it," continued Jane. "Isn't it odd, she never comes near us now?"

"Naturally she has other things to think of, I presume."

"No matter that the summer wind came breathing thro' the limes,  
So softly bringing nearer the distant village chimes;  
No matter that the roses bloomed, and spent their fragrant sighs,  
That saucy pansies stared at me with all their jewelled eyes;  
Tho' at my side a yellow bird poured out his carol clear,  
Still the creaking of the wicket only did I long to hear.

It was so amusing the last day of the riding party, for by some trick or accident I got a half wild pony that was constantly trying to run away with me; and I pretended to let it, in order to frighten them all, so that Caroline was, or affected to be in the greatest alarm: though I suspect she would not really have greatly cared if I had been hurt. And do you know, Jane, that my way of arranging real flowers in my hair, met with a decided success; for Miss Wilmot spoke of it to my face, and wanted to be instructed in the art. She also admired my new fan, and asked what it cost—vulgar little thing. There! my hair down again as usual; this provoking hair is determined to shorten my life and destroy my temper," Nora added, as the thick tresses she had just

arranged tumbled in disorder down her neck. She carefully re-adjusted her hair, then hastily pushing back the masses from her face, and slowly winding the dark glossy coils, as with a confident indifference to the observation of her sister sitting silently by, she hummed the concluding verse :—

“The musk of roses fevers me, I hate their scented blow ;  
Those rows of gilded pansies but scorch me with their glow.  
I’d rather catch his footsteps once come brushing ’neath the trees,  
Than the music of those distant bells or perfume of the breeze ;  
I’d rather than the linnet’s note so gladly swelling near,  
That the creaking of the wicket gate should break upon my ear.”

But on a sudden, Jane’s inadvertent wandering gaze was forcibly attracted by a glittering movement of the hand, marked in hard white relief on the dark polished background of her hair ; for a vivid scintillation, the sparkle of a diamond of extraordinary brilliancy, shone or rather darted out from the undulating masses of liquid black, and while the hand continued to pass slowly down, smoothing the glittering bands of hair, a moving ray of chromatic crystalline tints dazzled outward from the ring. Jane was amazed ; for Nora had no such jewel in her possession, and no means of procuring it. She was immediately about to notice it, naturally to inquire whence it had come, when something checked the words in

the act of utterance. Perhaps it was a momentary alteration in Nora's face which prevented her from speaking, for the instant she perceived the direction of Jane's eyes she promptly withdrew her hand from the light, and at once left the toilet table, retiring on some pretext to the other end of the room.

But what contributed above all to render this accidental discovery more suspicious, was that when Nora came down to dinner afterwards the ring had disappeared and Jane never saw it again. This circumstance accordingly gave Jane ground for serious reflection; as in any way it was most mysterious, and led to the most unpleasant presumptions. The only definite supposition she could attempt to form regarding it was, that the ring was probably the property of Mrs. Bradel; that it might have been made use of for the charades, and that Nora had accidentally retained and worn it since. But if that were all, how explain the difficulty—the actual impossibility as it proved, even of referring to the subject; for afterwards at the first inclination in that direction Nora assumed such reserve, became so abruptly cold, that to prosecute inquiry became out of the question. Evidently therefore something was to be concealed concerning it, and what that could

possibly be, perplexed Jane sorely. Whether Nora had still possession of the ring, or not, was also a matter of doubt; but in the end, as she did not see it again, in the interest of her own peace of mind, Jane was obliged to assume that she had given it to Edwin Bradel to return. This was the more likely, as almost daily opportunities of doing so arose: he was in the habit of calling so frequently with a note or message from his mother, or some flowers for herself, that scarcely ever did he ride by without a word in passing; and it often happened that he saw Nora only, if she happened at the moment to be in the garden alone. So in the end Jane became satisfied that the ring had, as a matter of course, been returned.

Edwin himself was now much engaged. Since the quarrel, the arrangement of residing at Everley was of course cancelled; so that he had to look out for a suitable house, to confer with lawyers, and a thousand other various things on hand, which kept him so constantly occupied, that the time to visit at the Lodge to devote himself to Caroline was necessarily curtailed. Besides, it was whispered, that he was not, either, on the best terms with the family of his intended bride, and was consequently only too glad of an excuse for avoiding any personal

intercourse whatever : with old Middleton especially. He resided, therefore, of late altogether at the club; where, amongst others, Slingsby had many opportunities of meeting him, of observing him closely, and of noticing a sensible change both in his spirits and deportment about this time. •

“The more I see of marrying, and of giving in marriage,” the latter said to Lumney one day, “the less inclined I become to investigate further by personal experience in such a direction. It seems usually a blank draw; or if you do find—considering the trouble of coming to the meet, the trouble coming after it, and all one must give up meanwhile—the run proves rarely equivalent value. It may be that some of us are getting wiser, perhaps older, Lumney; but I do suspect that a man who can keep a saddle on his two hunters, while his riding-weight doesn’t grow very shady of, say, eleven stone, if his nerve holds, I do suspect that such a man is right well off, and if wise will let well enough alone. Instance Bradel, at present, standing in his own right, as fine a fellow as fine feathers can make him, having everything his own way, and to complete all, about to marry, too, and where he chooses; yet a man actually in a more extreme state of mental decomposition than the same I never witnessed: from a fresh,

free, good-for-nothing sort of fellow he has suddenly become a maudlin, meandering mope, with a fagged strain in the eyes like the stare of a pumped coach-horse. His very heart is hamstrung and lifts at every step; he is a roarer, and growls like a bass fiddle string; his figure has flattened: his round florid face hopelessly flattened, even his hats have the very flattest brims; and he exhales nothing but faded smiles and flat responses: absolutely a personified platitude."

"Pure distillation of mere fear," answered Lumney, "natural effect of approaching catastrophe. A man of stouter nerve might well blanch when the flaming torch of Hymen stops at his own door."

"And Pennet, though equally fortunate, is scarcely in better condition," added Slingsby: "it is a fair choice between them; though when he does get Miss Troye, as they say he certainly will, your friend Penrose I should think may be worse than either, if all accounts be true. Seaton is already ever so much so, to my own knowledge: though what they all want, and why every one is after that girl, puzzles me beyond measure; unless indeed it be for the reason which made us ride the bound fence into Omera swamp on Thursday last—because others led the way, and that a fall was certain: I can't see the



attraction. However, Seaton and Bradel are altogether asunder on the matter, as Seaton, for not being latterly asked to the house, is very properly vexed; and I happened by good luck to be on the staircase the other day, when he passed Bradel as calmly as if he were a bronze of the balusters. I maintained, at the time, that he was wrong, very wrong; for, said I, 'If you think the little sloe actually worth powder and shot, the parson is certainly your man: Bradel may have hidden the nest, but the other fingered the prize and robbed it.' He is very likely annoyed, also, at not being invited to the wedding: but what of Penrose? there are various stories about him. How is he getting on?"

On the day subsequent to the interview in the garden, Luke received the following short note, so the reader may suppose how he was:—

"Strange as the words sound to myself, I was truly very sorry that you should have left so suddenly yesterday; as I would have had you wait awhile to learn from my own lips how thoroughly the only object of your gross, premeditated and indelicate outrage was attained: how certainly and fully you have thereby secured my deep and lasting hatred.

“To have overlooked your position so far as deliberately to insult me in my own house, argues an insensibility, or rather a plain deficiency of sense, so extreme that it rather perplexes me how to deal with it: for it may be absurd to notice your behaviour of yesterday seriously; as your fine talk about your feelings and your fine self would certainly be but merely ridiculous, if the language and manner were not in themselves too impertinent, and if the time were not also now past for you to claim an indulgence for childish vanity, which you seem still greatly to require. Considering all, it may be, therefore, flattering to you to learn that it was in your power to touch me, and that I felt the indignity; but such compliment I acknowledge myself compelled, however reluctantly, to pay you. You did wound me deeply, and, accordingly, if I have a further wish in connection with you at present, 'tis but never to see your face again.

“Should you think to write to me, do not dare: do not attempt it. Apology or explanation of any nature from you shall not be received. Never shall I speak to you again; it is as if some rude stranger had insulted me in the street; and I shall pass on, forgetting alike both the unworthy individual and the unmannerly outrage. Further intercourse with you

is, therefore, out of the question, henceforth and for ever; and a letter coming in your hand I shall most certainly burn, unopened."

It often feels even almost virtuous to yield to momentary impulses of feeling; as undoubtedly, it is always most pleasant to do so when under the acute action of some plain, unmerited wrong. Yet an excited will is so immense an engine, that to work directly with it within rational compass and control is scarcely ever practicable. Such an excess of power must invariably overdo in some measure; and we are so tenderly balanced, or of so delicate or such imperfect mechanism, that it is never safe to unmoor quite in the full flood-tide of passion: a passing shock, or trifling deviation right or left, then may lead us to irreparable catastrophe and ruin.

And so it was with Luke. At first he sailed with his temper so well that he had no leisure to reflect whether it might not carry him too far or altogether out of reckoning: he was triumphant, very triumphant; and happy, therefore, he assumed. For once, his courage and will had not failed in the trial: he had come out of at least one engagement with his cousin without leaving his colours behind; and he gloried in the rare achievement.

Like a wayward child that breaks up a favourite toy, he rejoiced in the novelty of a first sensation, without suspicion of the damage also done to himself. But the knowledge of that was not slow in coming, or dull in expressing itself either: the mainspring and purpose of his life was snapped, and the bitter consequence, the intolerable blank and darkness of the pain of loss, was not long in following likewise, or in producing its full effect. The tone and vigour of his mind by degrees gave way, until it ultimately sank in a crisis of irresistible and extreme reaction; and the pain and doubt arising from it became in the end so intense, that, at length, with violent self-condemnation, he made an entire confession of the whole affair to his friend.

“It was mere cruelty and madness of me, Lumney, to have hurt one so fragile and delicate; the shock might have been fatal—it might have broken her heart. And now all hope of her is gone: see how she writes to me.”

After running the paper over, Lumney tossed it with a smile upon the table.

“That girl is as false as a crocodile, and as worthless as from the first I suspected,” he said, after a grave silence. “Break her heart, indeed! first catch your hare. There is nothing of the sort about

her. It is clear you have exactly done the thing she most wished and wanted—given her an excuse for ending with you. There is not a particle of sincerity in that note. She is not even angry: for a woman in the rage she affects would not write snappishly—nor write at all. It is well you have ~~escaped~~ her: very well; for now you are indeed done with her at last. Whether you choose or not, she shall go her own way and you yours; and those ways shall never cross again as far as I can prevent it. What matter if she be beautiful? can the rind retain form and colour when the core is poisoned? How long will the mere outward veneering of her beauty resist the corroding action of the bad heart within?—a rotten orange, a rotten orange, Luke! If you knew all that I have learned about her since, you would hate her: as sincerely I do now. They are a bad set, those women, in the main—a bad set. A good one now and then but proves the rule, and the less a sensible man has to say to them the better. However, you must brace yourself for great effort; there is nothing else for it: and indeed, the sacrifice is no light one. But what matter? We must all face something of this sort some time of our lives, and the earlier it comes, why, the sooner one is a man, and has it over. No side paths and diverging compromise will answer

in this world; rugged tracks and cresting summits lie before every honest fellow, and the sooner he puts his breast to the work the quicker and safer the journey. But you cannot remain here now," added Lumney, with energy; "we must be off after this. I will call at the office in the morning, and get leave to keep you away as long as I please. We must have change of scene and of habits before you can reasonably be expected to get over this."

At no time, however, had Luke felt greater interest binding him to Ormiston, or was more unwilling to quit it. A strange fascination held him there, to prolong and nourish his misery by the daily consideration of the cause and consequences of it; and it was directly against his will that Lumney at last forced him away.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

## A NEARER VIEW.

To the unmixed satisfaction of the eager public of Ormiston, the period and circumstances of the important marriage were at length ultimately determined, and made public also—so far at least as a condition of the strictest privacy would allow. The day appointed was not a fortnight off. The ceremony, fixed for an early hour at Mocton Church, was to be performed by Mr. Pennet in person; so that Mrs. Middleton at last considered everything finally settled, and allowed her mind to repose with undisturbed serenity. But Caroline, on the contrary, suffering from various fears and vague, undefined anxieties, had from the first admitted the very worst forebodings; for the quarrel between the families, of itself sufficient to depress, was assisted by other circumstances, if in reality less distinct, to her nevertheless of infinitely greater significance. And as time drew on, it was daily becoming more obvious

that a decided, though to another perhaps imperceptible, change had silently operated in the character and manners of her future husband: where it lay, or exactly to trace its origin, was not easy; but its effects were visible in many and various ways. Her efforts to please him especially seemed gradually to lose their former value; and favourite airs, favourite arrangements of dress, trifling artifices of affection which it had been his habit to notice, were now unperceived or sullenly disregarded. His visits at the Lodge, also, were not only becoming rarer, but were latterly disturbed by a reserve, and an occasional want of cordiality which often made sustained conversation difficult, and parting feel something like relief.

If this absence might be partially excused on the plea of greater responsibility, or as a consequence of the increased business thrown upon him by the difference with his father; or if the preoccupation of his mind might also in some measure arise from the same cause; still, there were other things Caroline could in no way either explain or excuse; and in measure as the period of the consummation of her happiness approached, her distress in this direction increased. Her disposition had commenced to suffer from the condition of her spirits, and a not inexcusable jealousy was further added to



other causes of extreme uneasiness. The influence Nora had acquired at Everley, for instance, became at length an assumption of her own most intimate rights, and a personal wrong; she fancied herself moved from her proper place thereby—but as a foil, a background, and gradually reduced to being merely subordinate and complimentary to the other. Indeed this was in some measure true; for the subdued delicacy of her softer nature quite faded beside Nora's inherent brilliancy and stronger colour. It was in vain that the calmer judgment of Caroline decided against the fact of anything like the existence of competition between them, when every moment brought fresh proofs and made her sensitive perceptions more conscious of growing rivalry. She was actually herself never so dull as when the other was most prominent and brilliantly attractive; frequently shy and silent, while Nora of all things was never at a loss for a word—and too often it was a shining, cutting word, which left a distinct and permanent mark behind it.

The result of all this was to develop a personal enmity to Nora, so strong and decided that it even affected her intimacy with Jane at last—an enmity which if it did not absolutely owe its origin to, was kept alive and fostered by, the constant surmises and suspicions of her mother; who ever since the morning she

had surprised Nora and Edwin in the drawing-room of Middleton Lodge, freely gave the former credit alike for the very worst principles and motives. But, now that the period was approaching near when all doubt and misgiving were certainly to end, Mrs. Middleton was a happy and a thankful woman, and on the Sunday week immediately before the appointed Tuesday, she came down to breakfast radiant with smiles and satisfaction.

Caroline desired to go to church on this Sunday, of all days in the year; for impressed with the solemnity of the great change now so imminent, she felt a craving for interior support, and a greater sensibility for spiritual things: she wished to pray that the future might be as well as she timidly hoped it would, as exteriorly everything seemed to look and promise. Perhaps it was owing to the vague unhappiness of her mind that she felt so inclined; but her mother, however, would not agree to such a project on any terms.

“The impudent parish had said all sorts of malicious things, since the quarrel at Everley,” and she would not expose herself to its remarks, or provoke further its impertinent criticism.

So Caroline, then in no frame to oppose direct contradiction, necessarily submitted and remained at

home. But as the concession was against her own judgment and better feelings, she was ill at ease afterwards, and the Sunday passed in unwonted dreariness; which, as the day wore on, increased to such a degree that the merest ordinary inconveniences became altogether insupportable to her morbidly excited and nervous temper. The vague discomfort of the house, exaggerated by her mother's demonstrative elation, and even the very dulness of the weather, affected her so unreasonably that at length she escaped to the garden for refuge: she might at least be alone there, and have leisure to think. Even the weather was less chilling than the intolerable atmosphere within doors; so at random she selected the path leading down to the Cottage for her walk.

The vapours from the river crawled upward on the hill sides, by degrees blotting out the plantations and boldest features of the landscape, as she commenced her walk. The bleached autumn sun already dwindled to a mere rent of light in the spreading veil of mist, and the distant towers and gables of Everley Hall were rapidly growing more shadowy and indistinct; while at every step fresh showers of leaves came down on the moist wood path, already carpeted with them. The prospect was gloomy in

the extreme, the influence of the hour sad and cheerless, and Caroline well prepared to be affected by it, as inadvertently the bitter text furnished her by Luke Penrose again occurred to her mind. It was very true indeed that "there was nothing so cold as a thaw."

At the entry to the pastures, the Cottage garden lay immediately beneath, and in perfect view. An atmosphere of homely peace hung over the familiar walks, and the old garden lay smiling invitingly towards her, like the kind face of an old acquaintance. The sight of it brought back remembrance of Jane then, and a strong inclination returned at once to Caroline to go down and embrace her early tried friend again—a longing which was fast overcoming all meaner objections of prejudice and distrust. But, while she still, half-decided, debated the question, a figure suddenly moved in view from the shelter of the thick shrubbery at the farthest end of the garden beneath her, and a bolt of ice passed through Caroline at the sight: she turned cold at once, very cold; the kindly sympathy froze within her eyes—for it was Edwin!


Presently a second figure also became visible: visible in part only, through an opening in the leaves; but Caroline's instinct divined too surely who it was.

Alone with her ! And for two days he had not been at the Lodge, although expected there ; yet now he stood in her sight alone with Nora Troye,—visiting her alone : what could it mean ? What possible interest could be between them to which she, his plighted wife, was stranger ? of what nature a confidence with one so beautiful, so attractive, and dangerous—now likewise so obnoxious and hateful ? At once the wildest suspicions returned, and together brought a momentary energy equal to any extravagant or daring enterprise. Of this she must—would have instant explanation ; and accordingly Caroline was about at once to pass down through the wicket to the garden, when Jane's sudden appearance at the door of the Cottage evidently disturbed the pair, and immediately caused a hurried parting. For Nora at once went up the walk to meet her sister then, while Edwin took a contrary direction across the stile, and quickly gained the road by an opening in the hedge. Caroline could see it all perfectly : could see also that his horse was waiting some yards farther down the road ; and he presently mounted, rode slowly up the road in the direction of the Lodge.

Why separate at Jane's approach ? What could it mean, this double mystery ?—like some dark-faced

shame, flying before the clear light of truth. Evidently, then, Jane was unaware of their meeting; and that discovery as evidently did not tend to tranquillize or dispel Caroline's actual impressions.

But, at the moment, she had no further leisure for reflection, as clearly Edwin was now going up to the Lodge, and she must make the best haste back to be in time to meet him; but when she did meet him, then, her first words should be to declare what she had seen, and demand an explanation: on that she determined, returning homeward with breathless speed. Whatever the consequences, whatever it provoked, she would force an explanation of that visit; it was but a plain right, and she would insist upon it. Urged alike by the force of excited jealousy, and by a sense of burning wrong, Caroline made such haste as to reach the terrace before the house in time to see the object of her feelings pass on the flat of road below the lawn; at the moment even as he came towards the entrance gate, as he almost reached it, as he did reach it in fact then, he passed—passed quietly on his way without stopping an instant; without even one look up to where she stood on the terrace, with her hands tight on her bosom. She now became suddenly cold again, and her large eyes followed him blankly,



as he rode on through the seething meadows; until his figure, growing more shadowy indistinct, spread and mingled with the rising evening vapours of the rolling Orme.

It was not the sinking sense of grief, nor the weak tears she shed; but the compressed agony of combined jealousy, suspicion, and suspense, absorbing those tears at their source, which made the crisis in the sleepless bitter night which followed. Caroline could not rest or bear up under it. At length she wrote—wrote with forced, pointed words, directly to Edwin, plainly expressing the cause of her state of mind: a state which the language of the letter itself indicated clearly enough. She demanded an instant interview, and forwarded the demand immediately.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

## A PROLONGED VIGIL.

THIS same Sunday was a memorable and melancholy day to more than one of the reader's acquaintance. Mr. Bradel had spent the afternoon alone in his study; at dinner he was morose and gloomy; and Mr. Pennet knew that he intended to make his will forthwith, and leave away from Edwin every acre which the law allowed. He had various projects of disposal of his property, all wild and incoherent in their way—the promptings alternately of anger or of vanity; but all equally determined. At one time he would found an hospital, bequeath a sum for the purchase of a park and town hall in Ormiston; at another, leave every disposable acre to his nephew, Edwin Traverse, lieutenant in an Indian regiment; then there was the possibility of tying up the estates for fifty or a hundred years, allowing the accumulation of wealth to revert to some great grandson, another Hugh Bradel, who would



transmit the name to future generations. The vain old man hugged the hope of doing something which would create a sensation and perpetuate his remembrance.

Mr. Pennet no doubt thought it odd that the unprovided condition of some of his personal friends seemed to give him no shadow of anxiety—seemed to have no share whatever in Mr. Bradel's eager solicitude.

"But it is so hard to count on anything, or see before one, in a world where the most improbable accidents are constantly occurring in defiance of maturest caution and foresight," Mr. Pennet reflected, sitting up late that night at his bed-room window. "Only a year ago, for instance, what were this Mr. Wade's chances of Mocton reversion; and now, if his cousin became Mrs. Bradel, who would stand with a better chance of it? It was the most outrageous and extraordinary freak of fortune." Though weary with the fatigues and anxieties of the day, it was not at all the weariness which inclines to repose; and Mr. Pennet accordingly remained long at the window, watching the moon shine calmly down on the village of Mocton, bathing the church spire, the distant parsonage, and the quiet landscape in its pleasant light. It was thus that an acute con-

sciousness of his impending loss began to touch him nearly: he had thus the first practical sensation of how closely the hopes of this preferment were connected and interwoven with every dream and contingency of his future life, and he felt in consequence a foreshadowed bitterness of the imposed sacrifice. For, independent of the solid advantages lost, and the irksomeness of the labour their loss must necessarily entail, there were so many agreeable accessories connected with a settlement at Mocton, that it would be but mere self-flattery to indulge the hope of ever meeting with anything as fortunate again. The neighbourhood in every way was so suitable,—in vicinity to Ormiston, with its social seductions; he was on such excellent terms, not only with the Bradels, but with all the principal families; the duties of the living were so light, and the rectory itself was so well situated, and so easily capable of being converted into a most desirable residence, that on the whole it would be difficult to add further to its list of advantages.

Brooding in this way caused Mr. Pennet to pass gradually from a contemplative to a highly indignant state of mental distress. The more he examined the effects of Edwin's conduct, the more blameable in every light it appeared; it became not only un-

justifiable and selfish, but so thoroughly unfilial likewise, that, even if unconcerned, he, Mr. Pennet, must heartily reprobate it. "Poor Mr. Bradel would take it so much to heart." Even yonder light, still burning in the study window opposite, showed the effect it had upon him: he evidently was still sitting up, and such wreck to the ambition of his life might prove too much for the now feeble old man. He might sink under the blow: it would certainly hasten his end; and if it should—if by an especially malignant stroke of misfortune he were to die before the living fell vacant—there would go the last slender possibility of it at once: it would secure everything to this lucky and undeserving Wade.

It was a thankless theme: the more one examined into it, the more bottomless and barren it became; and unable to draw anything but vexation therefrom, at last Mr. Pennet turned from the window. He wished that he could as easily turn from contemplation of the subject; and as there were writing materials on a table, and some manuscripts of his own to overlook, he undertook in a while to do so, however advanced the hour; and as sleep was now out of the question, he sat down and bent steadily over them. But it was an equally irksome task, and proved on trial nearly a choice of evils between abstracted thought or positive

occupation for him then. The very nature of the employment itself forcibly brought back a keener consciousness of the narrowness of his actual lot, by directly linking to it the probable loss of his prospects and failure of his career. It was no use attempting it; the room was too hot, he could not do anything: a restlessness of mind, increased by the fever of repeated effort, deprived him of all power of consecutive action; and as two o'clock was striking, and he could neither sleep nor work, his will had sunk away, leaving him helplessly at the mercy of his distraught, fevered imagination. Inadvertently he went to the window again; clouds were gathering now, and came scudding athwart the veiled face of the white moon: like weird things they went, and so fast that he felt their shadows move upon his face. A rising wind, with the howl of a hungry wolf, was also gathering on the blue gleaming slates of the opposite wing, and swept down hissing amidst the yielding limes of the gloomy base court: it was a raw creeping night.

And that light—that light still burning in the study window; it grew quite red and large now in the greater darkness: and suddenly a strange feeling of alarm came over and took possession of Mr. Pennet's mind. "What was the nature of the employment

it assisted so continuously? what could require such attention? and how could the strength of the broken old man last out such lengthened application?" were questions which he asked himself, involuntarily, as he stood opposite that fixed ominous light. Then followed a supposition that it might be merely accidental, or worse than accidental; which was not improbable. "What if anything had happened: if the old man were ill, or needed assistance?" Scarcely, therefore, did this suspicion cross his mind than Mr. Pennet decided to go and see if Mr. Bradel's servant were in bed.

The wind, now fast rising, shook the rows of casements, as he passed along the galleries of the silent house; and as the servant's room was in the opposite wing, he had to traverse the corridors of the ground floor, along hollow echoing passages filled with the low wail of the wind, that now and then forced its way through the bolted shutters, making the light which he carried flicker and throw out great waving shadows before him. An invincible sense of loneliness was favoured by the circumstances, and by the hour; to such a degree that when Mr. Pennet suddenly and distinctly heard something come close behind him with a sort of moan, and at the same time felt a cold touch upon his

hand, he almost let fall the light for very fear. However, it was only Fan, the white spaniel, which had been crouching under the staircase, and slipped after him down the passage. "What ailed the dog?" When he moved on again, she slunk close to his heels with her limbs gathered together, as if frightened or cowed.

Clearly, Mr. Bradel was not yet in bed, for his servant was dozing before the fire. The man laughed in a ghastly way in his sleep as Mr. Pennet entered and shook him awake.

Ascertaining that he had not yet been summoned, Mr. Pennet decided on going up to the study immediately, even at the risk of intrusion. At the foot of the great staircase however, the dog, which no efforts, hitherto, could prevent from following, suddenly stopped short, and, sitting up, broke into a succession of low, short howls.

Their knocking at the study door brought no reply: there was no signal of life or movement from within; and when at length the door was forced open, Mr. Bradel lay with his face upon the table, amidst a litter of legal papers, hideously stark and cold—a rigid, ghastly corpse!

Over the galleries and halls a clinging gloom and chill hung that long night, until the lights grew

pale in the first faint streaks of day. With muffled voices and stricken faces, the pale servants glided noiselessly; for the hour of arraignment and of doom had fallen on the great house: a hush was laid upon it. Its heir was gone away, no one knew whither; and its head had also gone to an unknown bourn: but farther and faster than ever fleetest steam or telegraph might follow. Another prisoner had been freed from the close lock-up of life—had been called up to that great bar whence there is neither chance, nor appeal, nor slippery trick of law to escape by, nor able counsel for the defence.

With the first grey of dawn, Mr. Pennet rode into Ormiston. He searched the clubs and hotels, but could learn nothing anywhere of Edwin: how he had passed the night, or where he was to be found, no one could tell. He then retraced his steps as far as Middleton Lodge, but they equally knew nothing of him there. As he returned into town, however, the second time, Mr. Pennet was stopped by a servant at the Cottage gate. "Miss Jane wanted to see him immediately." At that hour, what could she want? Accordingly, he entered the gate, and Jane met him in the garden.

"Do you know anything of her—of my sister?" she cried; "she is nowhere to be found: her bed was

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not slept in, and we are all in dreadful alarm and anxiety. Has she gone to Everley? Do you know anything of her? Do not keep me in suspense. But something has certainly happened; I see it in your face: oh, tell me at once, where are you going at this hour? What is it has happened?"

"Mr. Bradel died suddenly last night, and I am looking for his son," replied Mr. Pennet; "no one can tell where to find him. Your sister has disappeared also: what can that mean?" And pale with a strange, illuminating thought, Mr. Pennet hastened back again to the town, intending to gain the port. But the news meanwhile had already come into town, and met him accidentally at once on his return. A gentleman stopped him in the street, and Mr. Pennet staggered back as if struck, to hear it.

Nora Troye was gone off—gone off with Bradel—off in the yacht; they were seen to go on board, and had been sighted off the port at day-break. Already the town was stunned and dizzy with the news; and the morning post brought full announcement and confirmation of the fact at the Cottage, with a copy of the marriage certificate. They had been married at the port!



## CONCLUSION.

SUCH was the final climax which closes the interest of our story.

Of course there were people in Ormiston, who had foreseen it all along; who knew from the beginning what Nora Troye had in her mind, and had also predicted that no good would come of such close intimacy with the Bradels. But that such a catastrophe should have absolutely occurred to a clear-sighted woman like Mrs. Middleton, admittedly astonished every one; and, indeed, rejoiced not a few, for Mrs. Middleton was not popular. The misadventure to her ambition was accordingly generally received as a judgment on her worldly and manœuvring life: an assumption which was apparently sanctioned by her subsequent conduct, as she gradually retired from the world, and, now that years have passed away, devotes her time greatly to charity-schools and religion.

As for Caroline, it was feared at first that Mr. Bradel's would not be the only grand funeral Mocton

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should witness at the time. The shock was extreme to one of her delicate and sensitive nature; but, fortunately, we are saved from committing such an offence against recognized rule as to kill any deserving young person at the close of a tale, when the bad should be punished and everybody else dismissed to perfect felicity—as invariably happens in real life, we suppose. But alas! for the dignity of passion, nothing is eternal under the sun; and although it is a first acknowledged principle of novelists to admit the human heart to be of the most fragile organization, yet it is, nevertheless, amazing what burdens so delicate a fabric is capable of enduring when it sometimes, unhappily and absolutely, must.

Perhaps it might have been more becoming in Caroline to have had a broken heart after all; but, unfortunately for sentimental interests, she had nothing of the sort, and rallied completely. It might be mere pride which came to her aid, for in a short while afterwards she was aware of never having really cared so much for Mr. Bradel at all; and in about another year she re-appeared in the world: in person not much altered, and otherwise greatly improved—sobered in mind, and more settled in character and disposition. She is now married and perfectly happy.

Married ! to whom ? Well, to Luke Penrose ; and no people in Ormiston get on better together. It was Lumney who made the match ; and to his death he did not cease to congratulate himself thereupon. Luke progressed steadily with his work, is now one of the most prosperous of men, and in the humble fulfilment of plain duties his wife finds true happiness, and occupies the path for which nature originally fitted her.


Many more years passed on, giving Ormiston time to alter rapidly, both in external appearance and social characteristics. The face of the town was no longer the same ; old streets had been blotted out, intramural gardens and greens utilized and built upon. But more decidedly than in material features had the tone of society there extended and developed ; old fashions, and old customs, sometimes old people, too, were being quietly set aside one by one ; and the spirit of its fashion was getting higher, more civilized, more progressive. If there were fewer entertainments than formerly, they were now on a far grander scale ; people might have fewer friends, but in revenge had far finer acquaintances, and the taste, in accordance, was becoming suitably ambitious. Improved upholstery, and a better style of equipages, were voted a decided advance on the homelier appointments of a

former time. So the town was in the proper spirit, and well prepared to welcome back Mrs. Bradel, when, after the lapse of those years, she did at last return to Ormiston, with all the airs and attributes of a personage of perfect *ton*; with her greys, her town footmen, and her flaunting fashions; corrupted in heart and grain—a mere empty, frivolous, worthless, worldly woman.

It is hard to say who is best off in this world. If prosperity be no test of merit, how shall we estimate the value of things? Or does it all come to the same—is everything merely equal in the end? do the ways of men tend invariably in a fixed direction, like the lines of perspective, unbiassed by the casual deviation of accidental circumstances? Nora Troye had succeeded in life, and won all she coveted in no common degree. She bartered with the world, and it paid her honestly with its best gear; yet where was the gain of it? on which side was the balance of profit at last? In her marriage there was soon an end of even pretension to happiness; for the burden she had chosen proved too great for her pride, and her capricious temper could not continue to brook it. If her husband at last wearied of its outbreaks and sought distractions elsewhere, she abundantly repaid his neglect with a contempt that scarcely minded if

he should gradually slip away into all sorts of shabby vices. Afterwards, therefore, when a separation by mutual consent was agreed to, it was an event for which every one was prepared, and which excited little surprise. Edwin Bradel then went on the turf, and became distinguished in sporting circles. His wife has since attained celebrity in the world: she is now a great lady, indeed, a marked leader of fashion; and the Ormiston folk have occasionally distant glimpses of her glory: but only distant; their interest in her has never been fully gratified, as she had her own reasons for never repeating that visit to Ormiston.

Where thus was the profit of all she had reached? What was it in the end but A Loss Gained? The promise of her early life, the freshness and capacity of her nature, had dwindled away in narrow selfishness, and perished without fruit. The past and present, both chances of her life, united to taunt her; the actual was a failure, the possible a mockery: for Luke had long outlived the last embers of feeling towards her, and could at last forgive sincerely; even meet her with a sort of intolerable pity. His success was a burning scorn to her, and her own heart revenged him well; for something of her old self remained to perpetuate regret. A reflection of



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hand, and ample estate. If she wasted and grew wan, people accordingly scoffed at her silent tears, and the good dean was pitied for having thrown himself and his fine position away upon a thankless mope. So kind a husband, so affectionate a father also, had he not always caresses and solemn pats on the head, which felt like blessings, for the children of the parish. What matter if the mere sound of his voice at once lulled a tempest in the Mocton nursery, or that papa's step on the garden walk was the immediate signal for his own darlings to drop their playthings, and move rapidly away; all that was behind the scenes: nobody minded such things. The peculiar temperature of his domestic life was not greatly anybody's business, while it was generally admitted that no man in Ormiston was more deservedly and deeply respected.

THE END.



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